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BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — A bill that aims to better coordinate and track Louisiana's medical services for the uninsured is nearing final legislative passage, getting approval from the House Appropriations Committee on Monday.

The redesign plan for state-funded health care already has cleared the Senate and now heads to the House floor for debate.

The bill (Senate Bill 1) by Sen. Joe McPherson, D-Woodworth, calls for the state health department to use computers to monitor a person's medical history and to create "medical homes" to coordinate care for those who depend on the state for health services, both uninsured or recipients in the state's Medicaid program.

A "medical home" would be a community clinic, health center, doctor's office or other neighborhood health care facility that would refer patients to specialists, manage disease care and provide a consistent system for tracking the care and medications that patients receive.

If it becomes law, the initiative would start with pilot programs in the hurricane-damaged regions around Lake Charles and New Orleans. Gov. Kathleen Blanco backs the bill. Some of the financing adjustments, however, would require approval also from federal health officials — a process Louisiana Health Secretary Fred Cerise said would take at least six months.

— In other legislative action:

- The maximum possible fines against nursing homes and other health care providers that inflict serious harm on their patients or repeatedly violate safety standards should be increased, a House committee decided. The Senate-backed bill (Senate Bill 82) by Sen. Joe McPherson, D-Woodworth, heads to the full House for debate. The state still would be left to determine if the nursing homes are fined the maximum amount.

— "You've got thousands of deadbeats that are out there."

- Rep. Warren Triche, D-Thibodaux, talking about parents who aren't paying their court-ordered child support. Uncollected child support in Louisiana tops \$1 billion, Triche said.

<http://www.nola.com/newsflash/louisiana/index.ssf?/base/news-32/1182200937325720.xml&storylist=louisiana>

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BRIEFING BOOK**Times – Picayune | 06.19.07****Community health**

A bill designed to reduce the number of uninsured people using emergency rooms for routine medical care by improving access to community outpatient clinics is one step closer to becoming law after getting unanimous support Monday from the House Appropriations Committee. Senate Bill 1 by Sen. Joe McPherson, D-Woodworth, would encourage the development of public or private "medical homes," such as neighborhood clinics or rural health centers, that would coordinate care for the uninsured and provide referrals to specialty care when necessary. The medical homes would be financed with Medicaid dollars, and participants would be required to use computerized records to track patients and implement quality standards being developed by the state. The bill, which is a key part of Gov. Kathleen Blanco's health-care agenda for the session, was based on the work of the Louisiana Health Care Redesign Collaborative, a blue-ribbon panel that met for three months last year to craft a post-hurricane health-care blueprint. McPherson's bill now heads to the House floor for more debate.

Punishing negligence

Legislation that would stiffen the maximum fines that could be imposed on nursing homes and other health-care providers sailed through the House Appropriations Committee on Monday. But Senate Bill 82 heads to the House floor with changes sought by the nursing home industry that lessen its potential impact. As the bill by Sen. Joe McPherson, D-Woodworth, was originally drafted, it would have raised the top monthly fines for the most serious violations to \$50,000, up from a current ceiling of \$10,000. Less serious violations could bring top monthly fines of \$20,000 or \$30,000. But amendments added on the Senate floor brought the top fine down to \$20,000, with less serious violations costing a maximum of \$15,000 or \$5,000 per month. It's unclear what effect, if any, the higher penalties would have, as research has showed that the state rarely fines nursing homes the maximum amount. McPherson's bill also would give state regulators new tools to sanction health-care providers, such as hospitals and group homes for the mentally disabled, that run afoul of state laws.

Arts instruction

Louisiana public schools would be required to provide at least one hour a week of visual and performing arts instruction under a bill that continued its march through the legislative process Monday. Senate Bill 299 by Sen. Sharon Weston Broome, D-Baton Rouge, which was approved by the House Appropriations Committee, would be phased in over a four-year period, beginning with the development of curriculum guides during the 2007-08 school year. Its implementation is contingent on financing being made available in the state budget.

The cost of racing

The House approved 96-0 a Senate bill designed to crack down on racing on public streets as well as other property "to which the public's access is not prohibited," such as shopping center parking lots. Senate Bill 215 by Sen. Donald Cravins Jr., D-Opelousas, returns to the Senate for approval of mainly technical changes made by the House. Drag racing is now a traffic violation and would remain so unless a serious injury or death is involved. A first offender convicted of racing faces a fine up to \$175, a maximum of 30 days in jail or both; a repeat offender faces a fine up to \$500, a maximum 90 days in jail or both. If a serious injury or death results, the bill calls for a fine of \$500 to \$2,000, a minimum of a year in jail and a maximum of five years, or both. Cravins' bill, exempts races sanctioned by local governments. The Senate is expected to approve the changes. The measure would take effect Aug. 15 if signed into law.

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Quality day care

Part of Gov. Kathleen Blanco's package of tax breaks moved forward Monday under a bill that would give tax relief to low-income parents, up to \$1,500 per child, for the cost of day care. The measure would also reward day-care facilities for improving their programs, and give their employees a tax break. Sen. Ann Duplessis, D-New Orleans, said her Senate Bill 361 would ease the "daunting experience" of finding affordable day care while helping transform the state's day care facilities into "the centers for excellence we so desperately need." The House's tax committee approved the Senate-backed measure without objection, sending it to the full House. The plan would represent \$26 million in lost tax revenue for the state. The bill would direct the state Department of Social Services to create a new rating system for day care centers, with the top programs getting five stars and the worst getting a single star. Qualified parents could get a refundable state income tax credit of \$750 for enrolling a child in a day care program that received two stars. Parents could get a maximum of \$1,500 per child for enrolling a child in a program getting the highest score of five stars. Day care facilities would also get a break depending on the rating they receive from DSS, with "two-star" programs getting \$750 per child, and the top programs getting \$1,500. Directors and staff of day care centers would also be eligible for income tax breaks ranging from \$1,500 to \$3,000.

STAYING IN TOUCH

To contact lawmakers:

- Senate: (225) 342-2040; fax: (225) 342-0617
- House: (225) 342-6945; fax: (225) 342-8336

TRACKING BILLS

Citizens can find the Louisiana legislative home page on the Internet at www.legis.state.la.us. Information on legislators, committee assignments, schedules and bills is available, as well as information on services for people with disabilities. The Public Update Legislative Services Line or PULS Line, is available toll free (Louisiana only) (800) 256-3793 outside Baton Rouge. Legislative staff will answer questions about bills, direct callers to committee information and explain aspects of the legislative process.

TODAY'S SCHEDULE

House convenes at 2 p.m.

House committees:

- Ways and Means, 9:30 a.m.
- Transportation, Highways, and Public Works, 10 a.m.
- Civil Law and Procedure, 11 a.m.

Senate convenes at 1:30 p.m.

Senate committees:

- Judiciary B, 9:30 a.m.
- Environmental Quality, 10 a.m.
- Judiciary A, 10 a.m.
- Judiciary C, 10 a.m.

Joint committees:

- Joint Environment, 10 a.m.

QUOTABLE

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Rep. WARREN TRICHE, D-Thibodaux, talking about parents who aren't paying their court-ordered child support. The amount of uncollected child support in Louisiana exceeds \$1 billion, Triche said

<http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/capital/index.ssf?/base/news-5/1182230622208490.xml&coll=1>

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Legislative Briefs

The Advocate | 06.19.07

Resolution would give state retirees cost-of-living raise

Some 38,000 retired state employee could receive a 3 percent cost-of-living raise in their pension checks if a bill approved Monday by a Senate panel become law.

The Senate Finance Committee advanced House Concurrent Resolution 7 which provides for the increase.

Louisiana State Employees Retirement System director Cindy Rougeou said there's sufficient funds in a special "experience account" to cover the much-needed cost-of-living increase.

The resolution by Rep. Pete Schneider, R-Slidell, now heads to the Senate floor for final approval.

Cockfighting ban bill advances

A bill that would ban cockfights on Dec. 31 won Senate approval on Monday.

The measure, House Bill 108, is a revamped version of a bill that won House approval with an Aug. 15, 2008 ban date in it. The Senate passed it 31-3.

A House-Senate dispute on when to ban cockfights is the key stumbling block to final passage. The Senate has endorsed two bills that would make the sport illegal this year while the House overwhelmingly endorsed a ban that would take effect on Aug. 15, 2008.

EMT supplemental pay bill fails

A move to expand state supplemental pay to include some emergency medical technicians died in a Senate panel Monday.

The Senate Finance Committee derailed House Bill 172 which would have extended a pay supplement received by firefighters, policemen and others to include EMT's who are employed by public EMS providers.

Committee chairman Sen. Francis Heitmeier, D-New Orleans, said there's no money in the proposed state budget for state pay supplement to local salaries.

"I don't want to give anybody any false hope," Heitmeier told the bill's sponsor state Rep. Beverly Bruce, D-Mansfield, and EMTs attending the evening hearing.

The state pay is currently \$300 a month and is expected to go up to \$425 for those firefighters, policemen and sheriff's deputies with a pay raise in the new budget year..

Heitmeier said the expansion to include the EMTs has not been approved by the state's supplemental pay board. "There's a lot of work to be done in this process," he said.

Bill to improve tracking of uninsured medical service clears committee

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Committee moves to increase some fines for nursing homes

The maximum possible fines against nursing homes and other health care providers that inflict serious harm on their patients or repeatedly violate safety standards should be increased, a House committee decided. The Senate-backed Senate Bill 82 by Sen. Joe McPherson, D-Woodworth, heads to the full House for debate. The state still would be left to determine if the nursing homes are fined the maximum amount.

House and Senate pass absentee voting bill

Voters who are elderly or disabled should be eligible to vote absentee by mail in elections, the House and Senate have agreed. Senate Bill 105 would let voters who are 65 years old or older or who have a mobility impaired identification card from the state Office of Motor Vehicles qualify. It goes back to the Senate for minor changes and then to Gov. Kathleen Blanco for her signature.

Bill gives prosecutors option of life sentence in murder cases

Prosecutors in first-degree murder cases should have the option of seeking a death sentence or a life prison term, the full Legislature has agreed. Under current law, prosecutors are required to seek the death penalty. With a 73-20 vote in the House, the Legislature sent to the governor's desk a bill by Sen. Sherri Cheek, R-Keithville, that would give them an option.

Bill would overhaul how state defends destitute defendants

The Senate Finance Committee approved a plan to overhaul Louisiana's system of providing legal defense to destitute criminal suspects, a plan aimed at allaying concerns that such defendants get sub par representation. The bill, by Rep. Danny Martiny, R-Kenner, would create a new state board to take responsibility from the state's local indigent defender offices, which are now overseen by 41 independent boards around the state. The House-approved House Bill 436 moves to the Senate floor for debate.

'Death Tax' and historic renovation bills pass committee

Senate Revenue and Fiscal Affairs, the Senate's tax committee, approved House Bills 43 and 141 measures by Rep. Taylor Townsend, D-Natchitoches, that have already passed the House: one that would eliminate the remnants of Louisiana's "death tax"; and another to give a tax break for people who renovate and improve certain historic structures.

<http://www.2theadvocate.com/news/politics/8062852.html>

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Swaggart's church wins appeal of summary judgment GBRBR Daily Report | 06.18.07

Family Worship Center Church recently won an appeal on a motion for summary judgment filed by Health Science Park LLC in a lawsuit between the parties concerning land on Bluebonnet Boulevard.

The suit stems from a purchase option between the Swaggart Ministries church and Gary Solomon, Stephen Jones and Terry Jones--the management of Health Science Park LLC. The suit contends that HSP caused damages to the church through its actions following an initial lawsuit against FWCC.

After the first lawsuit was settled between the parties (the church paid \$600,000 to HSP regarding a lease option for separate property on Bluebonnet), the church sued HSP for damages saying that the investment group had issued defamatory press releases and was changing the parameters of the purchase option. The church contends that HSP is not staying true to the condition that the land would be purchased solely for use as the location for an LSU medical center and related operations. It is suing for \$24 million in damages.

HSP filed and won a motion for summary judgment to have the parts of the church's claims dismissed. However, on appeal, the First Circuit reinstated FWCC's claims of reformation of the option agreement, securities law violations, unfair trade practices and a request to file a supplemental petition.

The court upheld the dismissal of the church's claims for unfair trade practices relating to HSP's first lawsuit, recordation of the option agreement and failure to act in the best interest of its shareholders.

The suit is still in the discovery phase, with no immediate indication of when it will go to trial.
(Seth Fox)

<http://www.businessreport.com/archives/daily-report/2007/jun/18/169/>

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