

Governor Rendell Pushes For Approval of Centerpiece of His Health Care Plan

Governor Rendell addressed a recent rally at the State Capitol in Harrisburg in support of the core provision of his broad health care plan, 'Cover All Pennsylvanians' (CAP), in a push for some movement by the General Assembly this fall. While the Governor might get some additional parts of his overall health care plan, for instance, a ban on smoking in public places, his universal coverage provision is likely to face more resistance.

Under the Governor's CAP plan, small business employers will be able to participate if they have 50 or fewer employees who earn less than the state average wage. Employers who choose to join CAP will pay approximately \$130 per employee, per month, and each employee will pay a premium of up to \$70 per month depending on the employee's family income. The proposal would also implement a three percent payroll tax on businesses that do not provide health benefits.

Measures implementing the Governor's plan were introduced this week in the House by Mike Sturla, D-Lancaster, and in the Senate by Jay Costa, D-Allegheny. Costa's proposal, Senate Bill 1117, does not include the Governor's proposed fee on businesses that do not provide health care insurance for their employees. Sturla's bill is HB 1870.

Senate Majority Leader Dominic Pileggi, R-Delaware, said it is unlikely he will support the 'Cover All Pennsylvanians' bill because of concerns regarding legality and whether it actually will reduce costs.

Before summer recess, the General Assembly did approve two elements of the Governor's original plan: bills allowing advanced-practice nurses, physicians' assistants, and dental hygienists to expand their responsibilities, and a bill to reduce hospital acquired infections.