

STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

BRAIN INJURY SERVICE PROBLEMS, COVERAGE MANDATE HIGHLIGHTED

By
STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

Katie

Lannan

STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, FEB. 1, 2017.....Difficulty in accessing brain injury services is a "little secret hidden problem" in Massachusetts, according to a state senator who led a commission studying the issue six years ago.

"Most people aren't aware that brain injury is a problem," Sen. Harriette Chandler said at a Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts Advocacy Day. "They aren't aware of the lack of services we have."

Chandler and Rep. Kimberly Ferguson filed a resolve that would reestablish a brain injury commission (HD 2114, SD 985) and a bill that would require insurance coverage for brain injury treatment (HD 2256, SD 987).

Chandler said the commission, convened in 2011, traveled the state to study resources available for people with brain injuries, and then issued a report that documented gaps in services including case management, day programs and post-acute rehabilitation. The Worcester Democrat said a new commission could provide an updated "road map" of the needs of the brain injury community.

The brain injury treatment bill would require health plans to cover cognitive rehabilitation services for people with all forms of acquired brain injury, including tumors, strokes, aneurysms and traumatic brain injuries. Ferguson, a Holden Republican who has worked with brain injury survivors as a speech/language pathologist, said the bill carries no cost to the state.

A similar bill filed last session was included in a study order in July 2016.

Health insurers generally oppose legislation proposing new coverage mandates, and an outside section in Gov. Charlie Baker's fiscal 2018 budget calls for a five-year moratorium on new mandated benefits.

Both Chandler's and Ferguson's bills are backed by the Brain Injury Association, which is also advocating for an additional \$2 million in funding for the Statewide Head Injury Program under the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission.

The association is asking for an appropriation of about \$17.89 million in fiscal 2018, a \$2 million increase over the \$15.89 million in this year's budget. The additional money would be used to establish a community outreach program to assist people with brain injury after they are discharged from the hospital, the association said.

Baker's budget proposal recommends funding the head injury program account at \$16.18 million.

Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders said at the advocacy event that Baker's budget includes \$20 million to expand services to people with brain injuries. Sudders said she has "no perspective" on the bills backed by the association because she is "just starting to go through" the thousands of bills lawmakers filed this month.

-END-

02/01/2017

Serving the working press since 1910
<http://www.statehousenews.com>

For assistance with your subscription to the State House News Service, reply to this message or e-mail news@statehousenews.com.