

The Quorum

August 2022

Nearing the End of the 2021-2022 Legislative Session

Our current legislative cycle began on January 11th, 2021, and will end this month, with August 31st being the last day for each house to pass bills. Governor Newsom will then have until September 30th to sign or veto bills. The past two years has seen a flurry of legislation, including AB 133, which extended Medi-Cal eligibility for post-partum individuals and persons with undocumented status, expanded behavioral health initiatives for California youth, and advanced the state's innovative CalAIM initiative. There was also the passage of SB 224, which will mandate mental health instruction in middle schools and high schools that have an existing education course starting in 2024.

Now, as we're just a few weeks away from ending the current legislative session, let's review the bills that died and highlight those that are still in the running to make it to Governor Newsom's desk.

The Bills that Died

First is **AB 1400**, California Democrats latest attempt to create a government-run universal health care system, named in the bill as CalCare. The last single-payer bill was introduced in 2017. AB 1400 was strongly opposed by the California Chamber of Commerce and dozens of insurers, industry groups, and the associations representing doctors and hospitals. The bill's main sponsor was the California Nurses Association. AB 1400 was held by its author, Ash Kalra of San Jose, on January 31st, 2022, when he knew it didn't have enough votes to continue through the legislative process.

Next is **SB 473**, authored by Republican Senator Pat Bates of San Clemente, that would have capped insulin copays at \$35 per prescription per month for patients with diabetes. SB 473 was opposed by the health insurance lobby, which argued that costs would simply be shifted to healthcare premiums, creating no cost-savings for patients. This bill died on August 11th when it failed to make it out of the Assembly appropriations committee.

Then there was **SB 250**, authored by fellow Pediatrician Richard Pan, which would have eased administrative hurdles for physicians. More specifically, this bill would have required health insurance plans to exempt specified healthcare providers from submitting prior authorizations (if said providers had submitted >80% approved authorization requests within the past year). This bill was co-sponsored by the CMA and would have significantly reduced physician time spent on paperwork and increased time spent on patient care. Non-surprisingly health insurance plans opposed the bill. SB 250

also died on August 11th, when it failed to make it out of the Assembly appropriations committee.

And in another big hit to Senator Pan was the failure of **SB 871**, which would have mandated the COVID-19 vaccine for all K-12 students in both private and public schools. While medical exemptions would be upheld, personal belief exemptions – as included in Governor Newsom’s executive mandate – would not. SB 871 was held by Dr. Pan shortly after the bill’s introduction in April 2022 due to an overwhelming lack of support.

The Bills that are Still Alive

Perhaps one of the most significant pediatric bills still alive is **SB 866**, authored by Senators Weiner and Pan, which would provide vaccine consent to minors 15 years and older, including for the COVID-19 vaccine. Currently in California, minors 12 years and older can consent for reproductive healthcare services and some vaccines including HPV. SB 866 is pending an Assembly floor vote.

Next is **AB 2273**, the Age-Appropriate Design Code Act, which was modeled after a 2020 United Kingdom law requiring online products that children use to adjust their algorithm/design to improve children’s privacy and safety. This would strive to protect children’s data and limit their online exposure. AB 2273 was introduced by Assemblymembers Buffy Wicks (D-Oakland) and Jordan Cunningham (R-Templeton). It is currently awaiting a Senate floor vote.

And lastly are a handful of bills that could expand abortion protection and improve access to Californians. These bills are the result of a list of 45 recommendations from the California Future Abortion Council – a group convened in September 2021 by Governor Newsom to examine the state’s reproductive health landscape. First is **SB 1142**, which would create the “Abortion Support Fund” to provide financial assistance for abortion patients for expenses such as travel and lodging. Next is **AB 1918**, which would create the California Reproductive Health Scholarship Corps to recruit and train diverse health care workers to provide reproductive services in underserved areas around California. And last that will be mentioned here is **AB 2134**, which would establish the California Reproductive Health Equity Program to give abortion providers grants for uncompensated care to low-income patients.

The Quorum is a monthly policy spotlight. For any inquiries, please email Chapter 2 legislative and policy analyst, Karinne Van Groningen, at KVanGroningen@mednet.ucla.edu

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