

2018 Legislative Preview

The General Assembly convened the short session Wednesday plagued by a \$240 million-dollar budget deficit that will consume most of the rhetoric until they adjourn in May. 2018 is an election year and each party is vying for majority control. Currently the Senate is tied 18-18, and Democrats hold the majority by only 5 seats in the House of Representatives. The Governor is a “lame duck” with 25 candidates vying for Governorship as well as many candidates for the other Constitutional offices that are also up for election.

The Governor presented a budget adjustment plan that sliced services and as well as proposed new tax increases such as tolls, increase cigarette tax, and bottle deposit fees. With the Governor being cut out of the preceding budget talks and eventual budget last year, many are skeptical of his plan even being entertained. That being said, the Governor’s budget proposes to reduce the enhanced reimbursement for primary care providers from 95 percent of the 2014 Medicare fee schedule to 90 percent in order to achieve savings of \$3.5 million (\$8.5 million after factoring in the federal share). We will work with the membership to coordinate grass roots efforts which will hopefully result in the money being added back by the General Assembly.

As the session is just beginning and specific bills have not come out, we feel there will be a number of issues to be concerned about. Opioids will again be in the forefront. As the State grapples with addiction and staggering number of deaths each year due to abuse, House and Senate Democrats have made opioids a top priority of the session. Non-emergency medical transportation and funding for it will also be an issue. Dentists would like the ability to give vaccinations and pharmacists are hoping to add flu vaccine for children 12 and over to their repertoire. This year the Department of Public Health’s Scope of practice review committee took up psychologists prescribing medications. Although the specific report has not been returned to the legislature, we fully expect that a bill to allow them to prescribe will be heard in the public health committee. One of the main reasons cited for why psychologists should prescribe is that there is a shortage of psychiatrists. To help address this shortage, psychiatrists plan to offer a tele-psychiatry bill so that more patients can be reached and treated. As the issues and budget move forward, we will keep you abreast of what is happening and where we should engage.