

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE



Week of April 13, 2020

State Issues

Senate Guidance on Policy Bills

Late last Friday, Senate Pro Tem Toni Atkins released a memo directing her policy committees to “pause” in their current work analyzing bills already introduced, and begin a new assignment focused on COVID-19. She says the Senate, “must embrace our role as policymakers and utilize the expertise of the Senate policy committees to identify key issues and solutions as we navigate this crisis. Therefore, I am asking chairs to put on pause the evaluation of existing bills that otherwise would be scheduled for hearings when we return in order to focus on the Senate response to issues that we must immediately address.”

She asks legislators to reconsider their priorities and reduce their bill packages. She says she will only move two bills this year. Committee chairs are to work with their vice-chairs and committee members to compile a list of issues within their areas of focus that require a response as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. “The Senate committees represent the policy expertise of our house and their insight and analysis will enable us to prioritize our resources on the most pressing legislative challenges related to COVID-19.”

More about these priorities – and what Senate Health is prioritizing – will be learned in the next few weeks.

Senate Special Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee

On Thursday, the newly formed Senate Special Budget and Fiscal Review Subcommittee on COVID-19 Response held its first hearing. The Committee consists of Chair Holly Mitchell, and Democrat Senators Anna Caballero, Richard Pan, Richard Roth, Bob Wieckowski, Nancy Skinner, and Republicans Jim Nielsen (Vice Chair), Brian Dahle, and John Moorlach. Several of the Subcommittee members took advantage of the new rules that allowed them to participate via video conferencing. There were technical difficulties that delayed the hearing for nearly an hour – putting the start of the “virtual Legislature” on a rocky start, but the hearing was able to move forward.

Testimony was provided by the state Department of Finance, the Legislative Analyst’s Office, and the California Budget Project. The focus of the testimony was on the impact of COVID-19 on the state’s finances and budget prospects. It is clear that the state has already entered into a recession – as evidenced by the substantial job loss and “abrupt halting of economic activity.” The LAO testified that the trajectory and timeline of the recovery is directly tied to the trajectory of the virus itself. If the virus is slow to resolve and there is inadequate federal fiscal stimulus supports, they expect that we will have a protracted recession with ongoing high unemployment rates. The testimony in the hearing continued to reiterate the need for the federal government to step up in their support. The federal government has the ability to run deficit budgets, and while the recent federal funding packages have been substantial, they are insufficient, and more action from Washington will be needed.

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<p>Senate Special Budget Subcommittee <i>(continued)</i></p>	<p>The result of the state’s COVID-19 response is that it has moved from a substantial budget surplus to a state “budget problem.” Both the Department of Finance and LAO testified that our actual budget picture is not yet clear and will evolve over the next few months as data becomes available – <i>see more from the LAO below</i>. While our state has historic reserve balances, they highlighted that those reserves are not enough to cover our revenue losses. They advised the Legislature to adopt a “cautious” and “prudent” baseline budget in June, while we figure out our actual budget picture later this summer.</p> <p>While the public was allowed into the building, if they followed social distancing protocols, most of the public testimony was offered via phone connection. The testimony was predominately provided by advocacy organizations making the case for additional state support for their ongoing work. This included several health care organizations that included representatives of hospitals, clinics, behavioral health providers, emergency doctors, and nurses.</p> <p>The Assembly is set to have its special oversight hearing on the COVID-19 response next Monday, April 20.</p>
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<p>LAO Reports on Impacts of COVID-19</p>	<p>In an earlier <i>Fiscal Perspective</i>, the Legislative Analyst’s Office discussed how California could face a budget problem as a result of the coronavirus emergency. In a recent post, the LAO described the state’s reserves available to address such a budget problem. However, the state has another source of support in this area: new funding from the federal government. In a new post, the LAO discusses the sources of a potential budget problem related to the COVID-19 emergency and how recent federal legislation could help address some of the sources of a problem – see https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/4217?utm_source=laowww&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=4217.</p>
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COVID-19 Information and Resources

There is much information and many resources emerging on the coronavirus (COVID-19). This section will focus on the ethical issues and concerns in treating patients, as well as provide additional links to resources that may be helpful to those in our communities and parishes.

<p>Catholic Ethics and the Challenge of COVID-19</p>	<p>The Catholic Health Association and Georgetown University are offering a weekly series of complimentary webinars to address critical ethical issues in caring for patients, families, coworkers and the community during the pandemic. Entitled, "Catholic Ethics and the Challenge of COVID-19," each one-hour session will examine the implications of specific critical issues in clinical care, organizational ethics and social policy in the context of Catholic Social Teaching and the <i>Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services</i> (ERDs). The distinctive question and answer format will provide participants with ample opportunities to actively engage in the discussion.</p> <p>The series will take place on consecutive Thursdays, 10:00am-11:00am (PDT). The first webinar took place this Thursday (April 16), and additional sessions are planned for April 23, April 30, May 7, May 14, May 21 and May 28. To register for the webinar sessions, go to: https://www.chausa.org/events/calendar-of-events/ethics-webinar-series/overview</p>
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<p>“Trusted Decision Maker” Form</p>	<p>As discussed in a recent <i>Catholic Health World</i> article, the COVID-19 pandemic is helping people think about what matters most. According to Dr. Matthew Gonzales, chief medical information officer at Providence St. Joseph Health's Institute for Human Caring, “to me that is essentially what advance medical planning is all about.” However, in the atmosphere of COVID-19, “legal requirements surrounding advance medical directives can sometimes bog down the process, especially when a self-quarantined population has limited access to the needed witnesses, a notary public or sometimes even a printer.” To fill that gap, the Institute developed a simple “trusted decision maker” form with only two questions as an easier alternative to a formal advance directive. It is not a legal document, so no witnesses or notary is needed. For more information and a link to the Trusted Decision Maker form, see https://www.chausa.org/publications/catholic-health-world/archives/issues/pandemic-coverage/for-people-who-don't-have-an-advance-care-directive-this-quick-form-could-be-the-next-best-thing.</p>
<p>Quick Links</p>	<p>For your convenience, following are a few quick links to ethics-related (and other) COVID-19 resources that we have reported on during the past weeks:</p> <p>Catholic Health Association of the U.S. https://www.chausa.org/newsroom/coronavirus-resources/</p> <p>Supportive Care Coalition https://supportivecarecoalition.org/resources-blog/2020/3/19/covid-19-resources</p> <p>Coalition for Compassionate Care of California https://coalitionccc.org/covid-conversations-toolbox/</p>

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