



Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee

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60th Montana Legislature

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July 1, 2008

Gov. Brian Schweitzer
Room 204, State Capitol
Helena, MT 59620

Dear Gov. Schweitzer,

Over the past year, the Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee has closely followed efforts in Montana to create an electronic system for patient health care records. This type of system gives health care providers an important tool in not only treating patients, but also in providing follow-up care to patients with ongoing medical conditions that must be monitored.

HealthShare Montana, a non-profit organization, has spent nearly three years researching how to put an affordable health information technology system into place in Montana. Participating organizations -- including doctors, hospitals, and insurers -- have identified the framework for a pilot project that would create a uniform "continuity of care record" that could be used and shared by healthcare providers. The system also has the potential for saving costs and increasing efficiencies and quality in health care services.

HealthShare Montana has demonstrated to the interim committee how the continuity of care record works, and the committee believes it will allow Montana physicians to provide better care in many ways. For example, a surgeon would be able to determine if a patient has had the pre-operation laboratory work needed for the surgery, if the information is not available when the surgery is to take place. This could eliminate unnecessary tests, and costs, that currently may occur. In addition, a primary care physician can use the continuity of care record to track whether a patient with a chronic condition is following the recommended program of care or is in need of follow-up visits. A physician group can view aggregate data from the records to see how well it is managing the care for a group of patients with the same medical condition -- diabetes, for example.

HealthShare Montana has developed a \$1.5 million budget for putting a pilot system in place, to cover initial costs for equipment and staff. The organization believes the system will become self-sustaining in time, possibly through subscriptions, and is working on a business plan to maintain the system's independent financial viability over the long term.

The Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee voted unanimously on June 10 to urge you to include \$1.5 million in your proposed budget for the 2010-2011 biennium, to create this pilot system. Health information technology has the potential to benefit not only patients and their physicians but also overall health outcomes for Montanans while improving our state's health care delivery system. For those reasons, we believe it is an important -- and prudent -- use of state funds.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rep. Edith Clark
Presiding Officer

c: David Ewer, Office of Budget and Program Planning
Joan Miles, Department of Public Health and Human Services

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