

TOM LAUGHLIN

1510 W. Park St.
Dwyer Intermediate School
Anaconda, MT
59711
406-563-7186
tlaughl@bresnan.net

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To Whom It May Concern;

I have been notified that a bill is in the Senate that will allow school districts to shop and find the most economical health insurance provider. This bill is HB186, and will mandate that any public school district will be able to obtain and provide its own relevant loss experience data to other prospective insurers in order to obtain valid rate quotes for coverage. As the legislature is meeting about many important issues, none can be more important than the cost of health care.

Our school district scrambles each and every year, trying to hold the costs of health insurance premiums down to a reasonable level. Our district is having a difficult time trying to find out which company can give us the best premium for the least amount of money. This chore is greatly hindered by the inability of the school districts being unable to provide their loss data to prospective insurers. This bill would "level the playing field" for health insurance quotes for public schools. Currently, MUST provides loss experience when requested as a service to its members to enable them to shop for the best price and program. The Blue Cross/Blue Shield sponsored MSHWP group does not. Currently, some 70 + school districts insured under the Montana School Health and Welfare Program (Blue Cross) are not able to provide their loss data to prospective insurers.

There is a problem with groups like Blue Cross. School districts that are a part of an association providing group health insurance for its members can only obtain the data for the group as a whole and not their individual district experience. As a result, a district cannot determine whether it is subsidizing other districts or is being subsidized. When insurance providers like MUST try to come up with a realistic bid, they must ask each individual member in the district to submit their usage. This data is almost impossible to obtain from all members and is subject to misinterpretation and overlooked data.

I am not saying that MUST is a better insurance provider than Blue Cross. In fact Blue Cross has been very good to my family and me. What I am saying is that if we don't find a way to control the ballooning health insurance costs, that in about 8 to 10 years we will just be making just enough money with teaching salaries, to pay the cost of the premium. We are asking you to allow school districts to shop and find the most cost effective program for the covered participants. Failure to have that opportunity puts the district in a position of being unable to assure its employees, taxpayers and state funding providers that public funds are being properly managed and spent. Please vote for HB186. Help our school district face the future with a tool that will allow every insurer a chance to bid.

Sincerely,

Tom Laughlin