

Testimony on S-132

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I offer my support for S-132. There are a number of positive provisions in this bill . I want to touch on some specifically.

1. Of course the Auditor should have full access to any ACO's records. A huge amount of Vermont health care funding is routed through the ACO and the stated goal is to move almost all funding through it. As such it would put control of Vermont's health care system in the hands of a for-profit monopoly, one that has already shown it does not embrace transparency, a key principle of Act 48. Every state employee's salary is public record and in many school districts every employee's salary is public. The same should apply to the ACO.
2. The proposal to take first steps to have health insurance cover hearing aids is welcome. Being able to hear has a huge impact on a person's quality of life and ability to access services. Like eyeglasses and dentures, this has the potential to actually reduce health care costs.
3. The proposal to control administrative salaries for the ACO makes total sense. Why are ACO administrators making two or threes times what the governor makes? What the Commissioner of Health makes? Bloated administrative salaries are a major reason why health care is unaffordable.
4. The proposal to include specialty care in the APM is more important than it may seem. Specialty care is one of the most expensive parts of the health system. Between 2000 and 2018 the number of specialists in Vermont has grown from 895 to 1858 while the number of primary care physicians continues to decrease. Our system is headed in the wrong direction.
5. The proposal to provide two free primary care visits is certainly welcome, but there is already a problem with access to primary care. Not that we should not provide this benefit but we need to solve the problem of a decreasing primary care physician workforce. Patients report difficulty accessing a physician because practices are not taking new patients, or they have to wait months for an appointment. It is most frustrating because I believe it is eminently solvable: improved salaries, debt reduction support, less administrative burden and a robust system of support services for patients. Vermont could be a mecca for primary care doctors. A proposal to address this issue is attached as part of this testimony.

6. The above are worthy changes and should be supported. The only problem with this bill is that it does not go far enough; it does not address the underlying problems. There is no provision to address the shortage of primary care physicians. There is no provision to expand mental health care and other prevention. There is no provision to actually keep people healthy to avoid higher costs. There is no provision to expand insurance coverage. There is no provision to address the increasingly unaffordability of prescription drugs. There is no provision to bring down the cost of commercial insurance. These provisions and others are what real health reform would look like.