



Title: Policy organization urges medical malpractice overhaul

Author: DANIELLE PROKOP Source New Mexico

Size : 67 Inches Sq Las Cruces,NM Circulation: 20000

Keywords: Fred Nathan ~ Think New Mexico

Policy organization urges medical malpractice overhaul

DANIELLE PROKOP
Source New Mexico

In a largely rural state defined by long distances to health care, the loss of 248 doctors across New Mexico in recent years means that patients face longer wait times and further travel to access the care they need.

Moreover, "New Mexico was the only state to lose doctors in that five-year period," Think New Mexico Executive Director Fred Nathan pointed out to Source in a recent interview.

The nonpartisan policy organization is backing several proposals it claims will alleviate some of the pressures on the health care workforce.

One of the biggest structural fixes, Nathan said, is addressing the insurance system for medical malpractice.

"Medical malpractice shouldn't make your eyes roll to the back of your head, because it's probably the leading factor in why we have a shortage of doctors," he noted.

Medical malpractice

refers to the legal consequences to acts of negli-

gence or omission of care that results in injuring or killing a patient. No federal law requires doctors to have medical malpractice insurance, but New Mexico requires the insurance if physicians participate in state programs; in addition, many hospitals require doctors to carry it.

In a 60-page report, Think New Mexico said the current system benefits attorneys to the detriment of patients, doctors and taxpayers.

New Mexico has one medical malpractice lawsuit for every 14,000 New Mexicans, more than twice the national average, the report found. A recent spate of high-dollar judgements has raised costs of medical malpractice insurance, sometimes by as much as 500%.

"The main beneficiaries of the variety of loopholes in New Mexico's current Medical Malpractice Act are lawyers, including some who work for law firms based outside New Mexico," the report stated. "The reforms proposed

here would prioritize the needs of patients while making New Mexico a better place for health care providers to practice."

Nathan said proposed changes this year would cap attorneys' fees from medical malpractice lawsuits; end lump-sum payments to patients; and assign portions of punitive damages from court cases to a public fund for medical malpractice prevention.

Think New Mexico also backs legislation enabling more interstate compacts for health care workers. "This is the single most important thing the Legislature can do this session to reduce the healthcare worker shortage; it is so easy," Nathan said.

New Mexico's loss of health care workers between 2019 and 2024 bucked national trends for all other states and worsened the gap of doctors, nurses and others to treat patients.

Nathan said solutions will need sustained work over the next couple of years to stop the hemorrhage of doctors, which is expected to double between 2020 and 2030, due to retirements.

New Mexico is a member of one compact that allows nurses licensed in other states in the agreement to more easily practice in New Mexico.

Title: Policy organization urges medical malpractice overhaul

Author: DANIELLE PROKOP Source New Mexico

Size : 67 Inches Sq Las Cruces,NM Circulation: 20000

Keywords: Fred Nathan ~ Think New Mexico

Several bills before lawmakers would allow the state to join compacts in the following fields: doctors; psychologists; counselors; audiologists and speech therapists; physical therapists; occupational therapists; physician assistants; emergency medical personnel.

Bill status

Senate Bill 176, sponsored by Sens. Martin Hickey (D-Albuquerque) and Pat Woods (R-Clovis), changes the medical malpractice laws by

instituting the caps, ending lump-sum payouts and giving 75% of putative damages to a public fund. Senate leadership assigned SB176 to three committees on the Senate side. The bill's first committee, Senate Health and Public Affairs, has still not scheduled it for a hearing. That leaves little time for the bill to pass through both chambers as the session nears the halfway point.

Outside of SB176, Think New Mexico is supporting bills for New Mexico to join compact agreements with other states to lower barriers for already-licensed health care workers to practice in the state.

The following bills passed their first commit-

tee, House and Human Services, on a unanimous vote: Doctors compact in House Bill 243, one for psychologists House Bill 242, a bill for counselors compact House Bill 217, physical therapists in

House Bill 82. The bills now head to House Judiciary. If approved, they would need to proceed through the House floor vote and through committees and a full Senate vote before becoming law.

Two bills for compact agreements for audiologists and speech therapists, and occupational therapists, House Bill 79 and House Bill 81, respectively, were scheduled for a Monday afternoon hearing in their second committee, House Judiciary, which was delayed after the joint session.

Legislation for joining a compact for physician assistants, House Bill 413, has not been heard in its first committee, House and Human Services. House Bill 412, which allows New Mexico to join a compact for emergency medical personnel, is also awaiting its first hearing in House Government, Elections and Indian Affairs.