

Berg sends mid-session flurry of bills to Senate

Contributed by Lake County News reports
Saturday, 31 May 2008

SACRAMENTO — Assemblywoman Patty Berg was batting a perfect 1000 last week, earning support for every bill she took up during a marathon floor session as legislators raced to meet a key deadline that means life or death to their bills.

Berg, D-Eureka, sent four bills to the state Senate during the session that ran from 9 in the morning until 10 at night. The long meetings are in keeping with the “house of origin” deadline: Assembly bills that fail to emerge from the Assembly before the gavel falls Thursday can no longer be considered during this year, the final year of a two-year session.

Berg won approval for a bill that requires doctors to give desired information to their dying patients; a bill that fights Medicare insurance scams; a bill that encourages medical students to study geriatrics; and a bill that would empower the state to help collect financial penalties from spouse abusers.

“It was a very good day,” Berg said last week, tired from the long session. “I think we made progress.”

Joining her package of bill that had previously been sent to the Senate were:

– AB 2487, which would help victims of domestic violence by using the state’s existing collections tools to help recoup civil judgments. Too often, said Berg, victims of violence are left destitute, even if they win a judgment against their abuser. The state’s Department of Health Services estimates that 1 in 5 women who went hungry for lack of money in the last decade also was a victim of domestic partner violence.

– AB 2543, which would help physicians and other health professionals repay their student loans in exchange for a commitment to serve the state’s growing elder population. Right now, there is only one board-certified geriatrician for every 4,000 Californians over the age of 65. Similar statistics are cited regarding specially trained nurses and social workers.

“The Baby Boom generation is on the verge of retirement and old age,” said Berg. “We have to have a workforce that’s ready to deal with that.”

– AB 2842, modeled on a law in Maine that puts restrictions on the way insurance agents can deal with seniors when they try to sell prescription drug plans as part of the federal Medicare Part D program. This is one of three bills Berg is authoring that deal with the way seniors are targeted in the financial and insurance marketplaces.

– AB 2747, which requires health care providers to answer the questions of their dying patients, when the patients want to know their options. Studies have shown that too often doctors resist talking about dying and death with their patients because of a professional culture that considers death a failure. Berg says dying people are better served when they are allowed to know the details of treatment options and pain management that other patients have received during their final days.

“Now, it’s on to the Senate, and then to the governor’s desk,” said Berg, who will leave the Assembly later this year, having served the three terms allowed under the state’s term-limits law.

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