

Committee Approves Bill to Modernize Medical Records and Protect Patient Privacy

Two Eshoo Amendments Unanimously Approved

Thursday, July 24, 2008

This week, the Energy and Commerce Committee passed a landmark bill to modernize the medical records system and protect the privacy of patients. The bill, H.R. 6357, the "Protecting Records, Optimizing Treatment, and Easing Communication through Healthcare Technology Act of 2008" or the "PRO(TECH)T Act" is based largely on a bill introduced by Rep. Anna Eshoo (D-Palo Alto) last year. The legislation will strengthen the quality of healthcare, reduce medical errors and costs and protect the privacy and security of patient health information in the electronic age.

The bill promotes the nationwide adoption of a Health Information Technology (HIT) infrastructure and establishes incentives for doctors, hospitals, insurers, and the government to exchange health information electronically across the country.

"This HIT bill has the potential to revolutionize the health care delivery system in our country and will have a powerful effect on enhancing patient safety, reducing medical errors and improving the overall quality of care. We live in the Information Age but healthcare remains mired in a pen-and-paper past. This legislation will accelerate the adoption of HIT and bring our healthcare system into the 21st Century," said Eshoo.

Rep. Eshoo introduced two amendments to the bill, both of which were adopted unanimously. The first amendment would direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct a thorough study on the potential of new and emerging health technologies that can better assist seniors and their caregivers while reducing health care costs. In the next decade, 76 million baby boomers will reach retirement age and technologies that allow them to remain independent and in their homes are essential.

The second amendment addresses how HIT data should be secured. While the original bill mandated encryption as the preferred method, Rep. Eshoo's amendment makes the bill technology neutral and allows for innovative ways to protect and secure medical records.

The bill now heads to the House floor.

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