



Senate Republican Leader Scott Wilk, 21st Senate District

SB 1089 (Wilk) - The Better Access to Better Vision Act

Summary:

This bill would authorize a provider participating in the Medi-Cal program to obtain eyeglasses from California Prison Industry Authority (PIA) or private entities, based on the provider's assessment of the patient's needs and assessment of quality and value.

Background:

California Prison Industry Authority (PIA) operates two optical laboratories in California prisons that provide prescription eyewear to Medi-Cal beneficiaries. Beneficiaries must get their eyeglasses made by the PIA or go without eyeglasses. The system is plagued with problems, as the eyeglasses are often late, incorrect, or of poor quality.

The pandemic has made a bad situation much worse. Some patients have had to wait for more than four months for their eyeglasses, which is unacceptable. The Department of Health Care Services claims that the backlog resulting from prison closures have been cleared up, but systemic problems with the PIA system remain.

Children who are Medi-Cal beneficiaries deserve timely, quality eyeglasses that are consistent with community durability standards. Cheaper materials may cause skin irritation and break much more easily. All children, regardless of income, deserve to have the same quality eyeglasses in a reasonable amount of time. PIA delays over the past year have resulted in children that are visually handicapped in their everyday classroom, recreational and other activities.

There is evidence that the PIA glasses mandate shrinks Medi-Cal provider networks. When coverage for adult eyeglasses was reinstated in 2021, two Medi-Cal managed care plans were forced to use the PIA labs. Many providers in San Mateo, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo threatened to drop Medi-Cal services if they are forced to send eyeglasses to the PIA for fabrication. The delays and extra hassle are unsustainable for these individuals given the very low reimbursement rates under Medi-Cal. This will greatly reduce the access to local care and timeliness of treatment for impacted communities.

Existing Law:

Current law requires a provider to obtain eyeglasses for an individual on Medi-Cal from the PIA. AB 579 Flora (Chapter 520, 2021) allows firefighters to get personal protective equipment outside the PIA system for quality reasons.

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