

May 20, 2020

Dear Honorable Louisiana State Representatives:

Re: Please Vote Yes on HB 263

The Association of Women in Rheumatology (AWIR) promotes the science and practice of Rheumatology, fosters the advancement and education of women in rheumatology, and advocates for access to the highest quality health care and management of patients with Rheumatic diseases. While there are no cures for Rheumatic diseases, medical research breakthroughs have led to treatments and therapies that can dramatically improve the quality of life for those living with rheumatic diseases.

Step therapy protocols, also known as “fail first”, require patients to try then fail on lower-cost drugs selected by their insurance company before coverage is granted for the drug prescribed by the patient’s provider. For patients living with serious or chronic illnesses – prolonging treatment (and delaying access to the right treatment) can result in disease progression and irreversible damage.

Patients deserve supportive, transparent insurance coverage – free from barriers that make it harder to get the best possible treatment. It’s critical that medical decisions are in the hands of patients and their providers – and not with insurance companies.

A decade ago, Louisiana was the first state to address step therapy practices. Since that time, more than 20 states, including Texas, have followed Louisiana’s lead. However, some of those newer state laws have brought to light a few details in our state’s current statute, listed below, that need to be updated and clarified through HB 263:

- Ensure step therapy protocols are based on widely accepted medical and clinical guidelines.
- Create a clear and expeditious process to request a medical exception by requiring a response by the patient’s health plan within 72 hours for a non-emergency and 24 hours for emergency situations. Right now, there is no requirement for if/when an insurer must respond to an exception request.
- Provide comprehensive patient protections to enable a patient and provider to override a step therapy protocol when the required drug: 1) is likely to cause an adverse reaction of physical or mental harm; 2) was previously tried and discontinued due to lack of efficacy, diminished effect or an adverse event; 3) is not in the best interest of the patient based on medical necessity; and 4) if the patient is currently stable on a medication prescribed by their health care provider whether from their previous or current health plan.

Current step therapy protocols in Louisiana inhibit physicians from being able to provide individualized care and can often cause patients to suffer unnecessarily.

Now is a logical time to update the state's step therapy law to avoid some of the unnecessary burdens that could be prevented with appropriate and timely care. On behalf of all the patients who would benefit from these proposed step therapy updates, thank you for your consideration of our request.

We ask you to support HB 263 by Rep. Mike Huval when it comes to a vote on the House floor.

We appreciate your consideration of our viewpoints. Should you have any questions, please direct them to our Government Affairs Specialist, at Heather.Kazmark@naylor.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Grace C Wright". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Grace C. Wright, MD
President
Association of Women in Rheumatology