CONGRESS INTRODUCES DEPENDENT COVERAGE EXTENSION ACT


Under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act signed into law (P.L. 111-148) earlier this year, health care coverage would be extended to adult dependent children until their 26th birthday starting September 23, 2010; however, the change does not take effect until January 2011 for federal employees due to current law, which defines family members as “an unmarried dependent child under 22 years of age.” The House and Senate legislation changes OPM’s definition, allowing the change prior to January 1, 2011, which is the first day of the next plan year.

While not required by law to cover adult children in the private sector until September 23, many companies and insurance carriers are already extending coverage to children until they turn 26. “It doesn’t make sense for the administrative burden to knock everybody off and go through the process of bringing everybody back on,” said Van Hollen. “A lot of companies in the private sector are moving forward to this on a voluntary basis.”

"With graduation season upon us and our economy still recovering from the recession, families should be able to help their children keep comprehensive health benefits past age 22," said Cardin. "Many insurance companies have moved quickly to extend this important benefit, and our bill will make it possible for OPM to do the same."

“Federal employees and their families deserve to be treated like all other Americans,” said Van Hollen in a March 29 letter. “I believe that the provision extending young dependent coverage in the new law supersedes the current federal statute, and I hope OPM will issue formal regulations and guidance expeditiously as possible that will extend coverage to young dependents up to age 26 as stipulated in the new law.”

At press, House bill cosponsors include: Reps. Gerry Connolly (D-Va.), Joe Courtney (D-Conn.), Kathleen Dahlkemper (D-Penn.), Eleanor Holmes-Norton (D-D.C.), Rush Holt (D-N.J.), James Moran (D-Va.), John Sarbanes (D-Md.) and Joe Sestak (D-Penn.). Senate bill cosponsors include: Sens. Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii), Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), Susan Collins (R-Maine), Kay Hagen (D-N.C.), Tim Johnson (D-S.D.), Edward Kaufman (D-Del.), John Kerry (D-Mass.), Mary Landrieu (D-La.), Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.), John Rockefeller (D-W.V.), Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) and Mark Warner (D-Va.).
**ACTION ITEM:** PASS members are encouraged to contact their representative and senators to urge them to sign on as cosponsors of the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) Dependent Coverage Extension Act (H.R. 5200 in the House and S. 3341 in the Senate). If your representative or senators have signed on to cosponsor the legislation, please thank them for their commitment to federal employee issues.

**IN OTHER NEWS...**

**TTD SENDS LETTER TO HOUSE LAWMAKERS REGARDING FOREIGN REPAIR STATIONS:** This week, the AFL-CIO's Transportation Trades Department (TTD) sent a letter to House lawmakers regarding the oversight of foreign repair stations. The letter urges lawmakers to support House-passed language in the FAA reauthorization bill (H.R. 1586), which mandates at least two inspections of every FAA-certificated foreign repair station by FAA inspectors and requires that employees are held to the same drug and alcohol testing rules as workers in this country. “TTD has long argued that the FAA does not hold foreign repair stations and their workers to the same safety standards as those imposed on U.S.-based repair stations,” said TTD President Ed Wytkind. “There is absolutely no substitute for direct FAA oversight of work performed on U.S. aircraft and stations working on U.S. aircraft should be held to the same standards, including drug and alcohol testing, that we require for work done in this country.”

**VOTE EXPECTED ON DOMESTIC PARTNERSHIP LEGISLATION:** Legislation introduced late last year in the House and Senate that would extend health and other benefits to same-sex domestic partners of gay and lesbian federal employees is expected to come up for a vote in the Senate before the July 4 recess. The Domestic Partnership Benefits and Obligations Act (S. 1102) sponsored by Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.) was given a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) scoring of $704 million over its first decade. The measure is also expected to increase mandatory spending by $310 million and discretionary spending by $349 million, a total of $649 million. The Senate’s bill is not as expansive as its House counterpart (H.R. 2517), which extends benefits to domestic partners of federal employees. CBO estimates that the House version will cost $898 million in its first decade. PASS will continue updating members on the progress of the legislation in both the House and the Senate.

**EMPLOYEE SAFETY RESOLUTION PASSES IN THE HOUSE:** On May 11, following a series of attacks on government workers across the country, House lawmakers passed a measure (H. Res. 1187) to raise public awareness of and help to prevent attacks against federal employees while they are performing official duties. The resolution expresses the nation’s appreciation of contributions made by federal employees, supports the goal of protecting their safety and security on the job, and urges the government to seek ways to improve safety and security. The resolution had over 73 cosponsors and passed the House by voice vote with no objection. “The tragedy at Fort Hood, the attack on an IRS building in Texas, and the shooting at the Pentagon are nothing less than acts of domestic terrorism targeting government employees,” said resolution sponsor James Moran (D-Va.). “This measure reminds Congress of the need for continued diligence in our efforts to protect the public from terror threats both abroad and, sadly enough, here at home.”

**REMINDER: UPCOMING RECESS:** As a reminder, the House and Senate Memorial Day District Work Period will take place May 31 – June 4. Since House and Senate lawmakers are working to reconcile the differences in the FAA reauthorization legislation before the July 4 recess, we strongly encourage PASS members to use the upcoming recess to discuss the provisions of importance to PASS outlined previously (see Legislative Update, May 7, 2010).