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Déjà Vu All Over Again on Health Care Mandates

During nearly every General Assembly session, the Ohio Chamber stands before a House or Senate committee to explain the harmful impact health insurance mandates have on Ohio small businesses. Unfortunately, this session is no different in that regard.

Last week, it was necessary to again outline our concerns, despite having already done so once before this session. This time it was before the House Government Accountability & Oversight Committee, which is considering House Bill 350. HB 350 would require all health insurance policies to include coverage for the screening, diagnosis and treatment of autism and autism-related conditions in all grandfathered plans and plans purchased by employers with more than 50 employees.

Small businesses that purchase employee health care coverage from a health insurer are the ones most directly impacted when the legislature passes additional health care mandates. Most larger businesses self-insure, and thus are not impacted by state-imposed mandates. Their plans are instead governed by the federal Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA).

Autism is, of course, a horrible condition that takes both an emotional and financial toll on families. Unfortunately, passing a mandate simply shifts the financial burden onto the backs of small businesses.

Too often, employers are unfairly made out to be the bad guys in debates over health care mandates. That’s why Charlie Conner, CEO of Alcon Tool Company, a small manufacturing company in Akron, also testified against HB 350. Testifying on behalf of the Ohio Chamber’s Small Business Council, he described the real-world challenges he faces in trying to provide affordable health coverage to his 60 employees. Health insurance is now his third highest business expense, behind only wages and raw materials. He explained how even small increases in premiums due to additional mandates could jeopardize his ability to continue to provide coverage for his employees.

There are currently seven other bills, besides HB 350, that would mandate coverage for other conditions pending in the House or Senate. Each new mandate adds upward pressure on health insurance premiums – premiums which continue to climb every year already. Mandates also force employers to pay for coverage that includes all of the conditions the legislature dictates, whether their employees desire, need, or would utilize such coverage or not.

Mandates like HB 350 only partially address the problem they aim to solve. The Ohio Chamber has recommended to lawmakers that, instead of pursuing an incomplete solution that also happens to penalize small businesses, they explore better ways to solve problems like lack of affordable autism coverage.

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