

Legislative Update – Spring 2019

In November, Wisconsin elected Democrat Tony Evers as its 46th Governor, and simultaneously returned large Republican majorities to both the State Assembly and State Senate. This ended nearly a decade of total Republican control of Wisconsin state politics, and gave Wisconsin split control of state politics for the first time in more than a decade.

As with each Legislative session, the State Budget will dominate the first half of the 2019-20 Session. On February 28th Governor Evers introduced his Biennial Budget proposal, including a variety of items of interest to physicians:

- 1) Accept Federal Medicaid Expansion, anticipated to provide coverage of an additional 20,000 Wisconsin residents, and bring in \$320 million in additional Federal funds over the biennium.
- 2) “Provide” \$365 million for payments to “institutions” (hospitals) providing care to MA patients (it is unclear how great an increase this represents overall).
- 3) Separately provides additional funding for increasing payments for Critical Access rural hospitals and “stand alone pediatric teaching hospitals”
- 4) “Increase” incentive payments for Dentists by \$38.5 million.
- 5) “Provide” \$69 million for MA non-institutional (physicians, other providers and clinics) Mental Health Payments (again, it is unclear how great an increase this represents overall).
- 6) Provides funding for expanding reimbursement of “telehealth” beyond current “real-time communications” – to include sharing of data/info among providers, to specifically allow telephone/internet communications between provider/patient and among providers.
- 7) Creates an “Admissions Medical Education Unit” at Winnebago, adding supervisory staff for evening and overnight shifts.
- 8) Proposes legalizing “Medical Marijuana,” and decriminalizing possession of small amounts of marijuana for non-medical purposes.

The Legislative majorities have already signaled their displeasure with Governor Evers’ proposals, especially his Medicaid expansion. While few of the Governor’s Budget provisions will survive the Legislature’s process as originally proposed, details on Republican plans are scarce.

The Joint Finance Committee (JFC) will begin its work reviewing, debating and voting on the Governor’s budget proposals in April. Generally, JFC concludes its work and provides the Legislature with a revised Budget Bill in June, but with a Republican-controlled Legislature and Democrat Governor, it is widely anticipated the Budget process may last well into the Fall of 2019.