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Missouri Law Could Cost Medicaid Patients More

By FINLEY WALKER • OCT 21, 2016

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A new Missouri law could require Medicaid patients to pay fines for missing appointments if the state gets federal permission.

The law went into effect on Oct. 14, and allows medical providers to charge late fees to Medicaid patients who miss their appointments without canceling 24 hours in advance. The law also lets providers deny patients from rescheduling appointments until all their fines are paid.

The General Assembly overrode Gov. Jay Nixon's veto and passed the bill on Sept. 15.

The new Missouri law goes against the guidelines of the federal agency that administers the Medicaid program, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services. Federal regulation only lets doctors charge late fees if they're fining all their patients.

Executive of government relations at Missouri Medical Association Jeff Howell said he believes it is unlikely that the new law will receive federal permission

"I don't think they've ever approved a similar late fee scheme like that," said Howell. "And I don't think that they would start here."

Howell said he understands what the bill's purpose is, he's just unsure how practical the law would be in practice. Howell also said Medicaid patients don't have disposable money lying around that they can throw toward late fees.

Missouri Health Care for All is an activist organization that promotes health care and health care program awareness for all Missouri citizens. According to Executive Director of Missouri Health Care for All Jen Bersdale, there are many things that can prevent low income citizens from getting to doctor appointments. Taking off work for some is very difficult, and transportation can also be an issue. Bersdale said this new law not only affects Medicaid patients, but could also have an impact on medical providers.

"People [who] that qualify for Medicaid can't afford these fees," said Bersdale. "What we know happens is, someone misses an appointment, they get hit with that fee, they can't pay it, and now they don't call the doctor the next time they need to go because they don't want to get another fee."

Providers will not be allowed to fine Medicaid patients until the law receives federal permission.

Missouri legislators who supported the bill were not immediately available for comment.



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