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Assemblyman tables measure to rein in soaring health care costs

By Beth Fitzgerald

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After more than two hours of testimony Monday, much of it in opposition, on a landmark [bill to rein in health care spending](#) by regulating out-of-network providers, Assemblyman **Gary S. Schaer** (D-Passaic) tabled his bill.

Schaer said he did not have the votes to report the bill out of the Assembly Insurance and Financial Institutions Committee, which he chairs, and said such major legislation would require input from the **Chris Christie** administration — which he said has not yet taken a position on the issue.

“With any piece of fundamental legislation — when you look at them historically, they originate with the executive branch.” Schaer said. “I would hope the governor’s office would begin involving itself and dealing with this issue.”

A parade of witnesses spoke for and against the bill, which would require health care providers to inform patients if they are getting out-of-network care, provide an estimate of the bill before treatment begins and require health plans to provide consumers with information online about the quality of the health care providers throughout the state.

Representatives of hospitals, surgery centers and doctors spoke against the bill, which drew support from several unions that provide self-funded health plans to their members, and are facing double-digit health cost increases.

The New Jersey Business and Industry Association testified in favor of the bill, as did the New Jersey Association of Health Underwriters. Both groups voiced frustrations of employers who are facing 25 to 30 percent spikes in health insurance premiums, and are dropping coverage for their employees as health costs spiral out of control.

Schaer said he did not know when he might propose another bill, but “clearly, on a bill of this magnitude, it requires support from the front office.” A spokesman for the governor could not be reached for comment.

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