

8. Two lawmakers press for coverage of cervical cancer vaccine, Gannett (1/23/07)

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BY GREGORY J. VOLPE, GANNETT STATE BUREAU

TRENTON — Two Republican lawmakers are pushing legislation that would require insurers to cover the vaccine for human papillomavirus, or HPV, the most common sexually transmitted infection that leads to most cases of cervical cancer.

Assemblyman Bill Baroni Jr., R-Mercer, and Assemblywoman Jennifer Beck, R-Monmouth, joined doctors Monday — during Cervical Health Awareness Month — to push for a bill that would require insurers to cover the vaccine Gardasil.

But the state Pension and Health Benefits Review Commission last Friday recommended against the measure because it adds \$2.2 million in health insurance costs to state and local government, Department of the Treasury spokesman Tom Vincz said.

Vaccine proponents scoffed at that figure, saying the medicine costs about \$400 while treating a case of cervical cancer costs tens of thousands of dollars.

"The health benefits review commission was a little quick to reach judgment and short-sighted in their decision," Beck said.

Added Sen. Loretta Weinberg, D-Bergen, one of the Senate sponsors of the proposal, "Tell them I hope none of their wives or daughters come down with cancer."

Brendan Gilfillan, a spokesman for Gov. Corzine, declined comment, saying the administration is reviewing both the legislation and the benefit commission's recommendation.

Brad Greenbaum, president of the New Jersey Association of Health Underwriters, said the bill "looks like it could be excellent legislation" but questioned why it did not go before the Department of Banking and Insurance's Mandated Health Benefits Advisory Committee, which would not only study costs but cost savings and health impact.

Jaimee Gilmartin, spokeswoman for the Department of Banking and Insurance, said it's up to Assemblyman Neil Cohen, D-Union, chairman of the Assembly Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee, to refer the matter to the mandated benefits committee.

The Assembly bill, along with an identical measure sponsored in the Senate by three Democrats, has not had a committee hearing.

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