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**May 13, 2024**

* **Casey Introduces Bill to Promote Alternatives to Guardianship**

U.S. Senator Bob Casey (D-PA), serving as the Chairman of the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging, [introduced](https://www.aging.senate.gov/press-releases/casey-introduces-bill-to-promote-alternatives-to-guardianship) the Alternatives to Guardianship Education Act. This legislation aims to protect older adults and people with disabilities from abuse by educating those who often interact with these groups—such as educators, healthcare providers, court personnel, and family members—about guardianship alternatives. Guardianships, legal frameworks established by courts for individuals deemed unable to make critical decisions independently, can inadvertently diminish the autonomy of older adults and people with disabilities and lead to abuse. Recognizing the need for greater public awareness, Senator Casey's bill proposes funding for educational initiatives on less restrictive options like supported decision-making and advance directives, potentially reducing abuse risks.

* **CMCS Announces Extension of Temporary Unwinding-Related Flexibilities**

The Center for Medicaid & CHIP Services (CMCS) [announced](https://healthsperien.us19.list-manage.com/track/click?u=b80803827ec1d826bd16eace6&id=19d47f670f&e=61cef33e0e) the extension of unwinding-related flexibilities, designed to assist states in maintaining coverage for eligible individuals during the unwinding period of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, through June 30, 2025. Following a three-year hiatus during the pandemic, states resumed Medicaid redeterminations on April 1, 2023. To support states in managing renewals and eligibility processes, the Biden Administration provided states with several Section 1902(e)(14)(A) waiver options. Initially set to expire on December 31, 2024, these waivers have allowed states to renew beneficiaries' coverage based on their eligibility for programs like the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). CMCS shared a bulletin that outlines the procedures for states to extend or modify flexibilities. Other COVID-19-related flexibilities, such as verification plan addendums and regulatory exceptions to timely determinations, have also extended through June 30, 2025.

* **Fetterman & Smith Introduce Bill to Establish Senate Commission on Mental Health**

U.S. Senators John Fetterman (D-PA) and Tina Smith (D-MN) [introduced](https://www.fetterman.senate.gov/press-releases/news-fetterman-smith-introduce-bill-to-establish-senate-commission-on-mental-health/) legislation that seeks to establish a Senate Commission tasked with providing independent, expert policy recommendations aimed at improving the accessibility and affordability of mental health care services.

In its initial year, the Commission would focus on:

* Coverage of mental health care services, including mental health parity requirements, under federal health plans.
* Reimbursement rates for mental health care services with regard to mental health care providers.
* Workforce challenges, including barriers to entering this field and challenges faced by mental health care providers, including factors that contribute to burnout.

Annually, the Commission would report its findings and policy recommendations to Congress, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, and other relevant federal agencies, including an analysis of current barriers, workforce challenges, and actions needed to improve mental health care delivery across various jurisdictions.

* **Supreme Court Asked to Consider Whether Parents Can Record IEP Meeting**

The U.S. Supreme Court is being asked to take up a [case](https://www.disabilityscoop.com/2024/05/13/supreme-court-asked-to-consider-whether-parents-can-record-iep-meetings/30877/) that revolves around the question of whether parents have the right to record meetings with their child’s school district regarding special education services. Scott Pitta is appealing to the high court after a federal appeals court ruled that school officials could prevent him from video recording a virtual meeting about his son J.J.’s Individualized Education Program (IEP). The core issue is whether parents have a First Amendment right to “record government officials in the performance of their duties.”

* **Social Security and Medicare Depletion Dates Pushed Back Due to Improving Economy**

 The U.S. economy's recent improved performance has led the federal government to delay the projected depletion dates for the [Social Security](https://www.ssa.gov/oact/TR/2024/tr2024.pdf) and [Medicare](https://www.cms.gov/oact/tr/2024) funds, according to the latest annual trustees' reports. Social Security can now pay full benefits until 2035, which is a year longer than previous estimates, while Medicare's hospital insurance trust fund's depletion date has been extended by five years to 2036, due to increased payroll tax revenues and lower expenses than anticipated. Despite these extensions, the trustees warn that without significant policy reforms, both programs will face a shortfall in the future. Social Security supports approximately 71 million individuals, including retirees and people with disabilities, while Medicare provides health coverage to over 66 million Americans, primarily those aged 65 and older or with severe disabilities. The trustees' report underscores the need for legislative action to address the sustainability of these critical programs.

* **New York Times Publishes Essay Titled “Disabled Adults Shouldn’t Have to Pay This Price to Marry”**

The article [discusses](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/12/opinion/disabled-adults-ssi-marriage.html#:~:text=You%20can%20marry%2C%20but%20only,to%20earn%20a%20living%20wage.) the challenges faced by disabled adults, focusing on the story of Heather Hancock and Craig Blackburn, who are Heather Hancock and Craig Blackburn, who are both recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Despite wanting to marry, they are deterred by the financial penalties that result from being married SSI recipients. The author, Pepper Stetler, who has a daughter with Down syndrome, emphasizes the personal impact of these policies and advocates for reforms to raise income and asset limits for SSI recipients and eliminate marriage penalties. Stetler highlights the broader issue of caregiving in America and calls for legislative action to address the challenges faced by disabled individuals and their families.

**What’s on Tap**

* Last week, the House Ways & Means Committee held a [markup](https://waysandmeans.house.gov/event/markup-of-h-r-____-h-r-7931-h-r-8245-h-r-8244-h-r-8235-and-h-r-8246/) on six bills aimed at addressing critical health issues, such as the continuation of telehealth and health-at-home access, the prevention of rural hospital closures, support for ambulance services, and the expansion of the rural health care workforce. [Legislation](https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/8261) proposed by Reps. David Schweikert (R-Ariz.) and Mike Thompson (D-Calif.) looks to extend pandemic-era telehealth flexibilities in Medicare through December 31, 2026, and the Acute Hospital Care at Home (AHCAH) waiver until 2029. The six bills received unanimous approval to move out of committee. However, if the legislation does not pass through Congress, the telehealth provisions and AHCAH waiver are set to expire at the end of 2024.

* The Justice Department [launched](https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/assistant-attorney-general-jonathan-kanter-announces-task-force-health-care-monopolies-and) the Antitrust Division’s Task Force on Health Care Monopolies and Collusion (HCMC), aimed at tackling monopolies and collusive practices in the healthcare sector that prevent Americans from affording and accessing the health care services they need. The task force will tackle consolidation activities of pharmacy benefit managers, as well as payers and providers, in addition to investigating the misuse of patient data. This action aligns with bipartisan legislative efforts to reform the business practices of pharmaceutical supply chain intermediaries. Advocates for reform argue that these practices threaten the sustainability of other drug industry stakeholders and restrict patients' access to reasonably priced prescription medications.

**Upcoming Events**

**Wednesday**

* The House Education and the Workforce Committee will hold a [hearing](https://edworkforce.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=410541) on “Examining the Policies and Priorities of the Department of Health and Human Services” at 10:15 AM EST.
* The Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee will hold a [hearing](https://www.veterans.senate.gov/2024/5/frontier-health-care-ensuring-veterans-access-no-matter-where-they-live) on “Frontier Health Care: Ensuring Veterans’ Access No Matter Where They Live” at 3:30 PM EST.

**Thursday**

* The House Oversight and Accountability Select Coronavirus Pandemic Subcommittee will hold a [hearing](https://oversight.house.gov/hearing/overseeing-the-overseers-a-hearing-with-nih-deputy-director-lawrence-tabak/) on “Overseeing the Overseers: A Hearing with NIH Deputy Director Lawrence Tabak” at 9:00 AM EST.
* The Senate Finance Committee will hold a [hearing](https://www.finance.senate.gov/hearings/rural-health-care-supporting-lives-and-improving-communities) on “Rural Health Care: Supporting Lives and Improving Communities” at 10:00 AM EST.
* The Federal Communications Commission will hold a [virtual meeting](https://www.fcc.gov/news-events/events/2024/05/disability-advisory-committee-meeting) of the Disability Advisory Committee (DAC) to discuss the current and emerging challenges and opportunities in the area of digital accessibility, receive updates from the working groups and address any other topics relevant to the DAC's work at 10 AM EST.

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