

NEWS RELEASE

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MMA SUPPORTS BILL TO SUSPEND IMAGING AUTHORIZATIONS

MINNEAPOLIS—A bill was introduced this week in the Minnesota Legislature that would place a moratorium on high-technology medical imaging authorization programs until December, 2008.

H.F. 2003, sponsored by Rep. Thomas Huntley, DFL-Duluth, and S.F.1752, sponsored by Sen. Sandy Pappas, DFL-St. Paul, would halt health plans' practice of requiring prior authorizations from third-party utilization review vendors before physicians can refer patients for MRIs, CT scans, and other high-technology imaging.

Physicians have criticized the requirement, saying that the consultations are a waste of their time, their clinics' resources, and their patients' patience.

The MMA worked with lawmakers to draft the language of the moratorium bill: "Health plan companies are prohibited from requiring prior authorization, notification, or consultation, including through existing programs, for diagnostic imaging services, including but not limited to computed tomography (CT), magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), positron emission tomography (PET), magnetic resonance angiography (MRA), and nuclear cardiology, until December 15, 2008."

The bill further calls for the commissioner of health to establish a 12-member diagnostic imaging services advisory committee that would find out what is causing increased use of imaging services, and make recommendations on how to improve the delivery of those services. The committee would include three physician members appointed by the MMA.

The bill introduction is the latest action in a series of MMA responses to physician concerns about high-tech utilization review. The MMA wrote to the Minnesota commissioner of commerce, alleging that one of the health plans' third-party vendors, HealthHelp, is operating in violation of Minnesota state law because it is not licensed to perform utilization review in Minnesota.

Earlier the MMA wrote to health plans, urging them to withdraw the authorization and recommending that there be a community-wide effort to collect information that will result in a clear understanding of high-tech imaging use throughout Minnesota; that the

data collected be used to develop solutions that will address any inappropriate use of high-tech imaging; and that health care providers rapidly move toward implementing evidence based decision support tools at the point of care. The MMA has provided links to decision support tools on its website.