

# Bill would prohibit genetic testing for health coverage

**BY TIM RICHARD  
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Employers and insurers would be prohibited from requiring genetic testing for a job or health coverage if a state commission recommendation becomes law.

"I congratulate the members of the commission for their thoughtful and thorough review of these critical issues," said Gov. John Engler, who appointed the panel and endorsed its conclusions in his State of the State address.

The governor's Michigan Commission on Genetic Privacy and Progress reported early in February. Legislative committees in Lansing already are working on bills. Key lawmakers are Rep. Gerald Law, R-Plymouth, chair of the House

Health Policy Committee, and Sen. Dale Shugars, R-Portage, chair of the Senate Health Policy Committee.

Group employer health insurance plans "generally do not require genetic testing or other forms of risk assessment of applicants," said the panel. "The insurance industry points out that it is not common practice for health insurers to require genetic testing for obtaining or retaining policies," it added. But it noted there's no law against genetic testing.

Genes are units of heredity. Many diseases and physical conditions are passed from parents to children through the genetic code. A person with genes causing — say, colon cancer at age 45 or a bad heart — is likely to be rejected for employment and

**STATE NEWS**

insurance, if the employer and insurer have that information.

The commission was chaired by attorney Edward Goldman of the University of Michigan Health System, Ann Arbor. Among its members was Dr. David J. Aughton of William Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak.

Other members included the directors of the state departments of Community Health and Civil Rights, a life insurance company attorney, a representative of the Huntington's Disease Society and health professionals.

**What state should do**

The report hinted some recommendations weren't unanimous but gave no details of who dis-

sented or why.

The commission recommended:

- "Legislation to prohibit health insurers from requiring predictive genetic testing or testing for carrier status of asymptomatic individuals."
- Legislation to prevent use of genetic testing as a condition of employment.
- A model curriculum for K-12 schools on genetics.
- In criminal investigations, "if suspects are eliminated from further investigation, all of their DNA samples and records be destroyed in the presence of witnesses at a state-designated testing site."
- "Newborn screening continue as it currently has with no requirement for informed consent due to the important public

health benefit of screening."

- In paternity cases, DNA-identifying information should not be forwarded to courts. "The concern is to avoid placing genetic information in the public record," the panel said.

**Share with family**

"Most genetic testing involves a blood test, usually a venipuncture blood test," according to Kathleen Valverde, clinical coordinator of the genetic counseling training program at Beaver College in Pennsylvania.

"Usually the lab would need about 100 cc's, or two to three tablespoons of blood."

Hundreds of tests are available, Valverde said, ranging in cost from \$100 to several thousands for the rarer tests. It can take two weeks to several

months for the laboratory to produce results. There are tests for 450 diseases.

"I also feel that with a positive result (for the defect), you're morally obligated to share that information with your family, because they are at risk, too," Valverde said. "Genetic professionals legally are not allowed to contact family members or tell others that they might be at risk."

On this point, the Michigan commission recommended that "a physician be permitted, but not obligated, to disclose information to family members in the event that failure to disclose the information could reasonably lead to preventable serious harm to that person, and the patient refuses, even after counseling, to disclose that information."

## FARMINGTON NOTABLES

**Resident elected chairman**

Gabriel Werba, a founding principal of the public and financial relations firm of Duracher-Dixon-Werba LLC, based in Detroit and Fort Lauderdale, Fla., was elected vice-chair of the Financial Communications Section of the Public Relations Society of America. He has also served as a director of the Michigan chapter of the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences and was founding president of the Michigan chapter of the National Investor Relations Institute.

Werba and his wife, Barrie, live in Farmington Hills.



Gabriel Werba

**Top Agent Award**

The Stein Agency/ Northwestern Mutual Life of Troy recently awarded James Landberg of Farmington Hills the Stein Agency's Top Agent Award. He has earned all the company's and industry's awards for sales achievement and service and has been with Northwestern Mutual Life since 1986.

**Shareholder**

Robert McFarland, a shareholder for Foster, Smith, Collins & Smith P.C., was elected to the firm's 1999 executive committee. He is a resident of the firm's Farmington Hills office and practices primarily in the area of transportation and motor carrier law. He joined the firm in 1992.

**'Big' board member**

Lori Lipten of Farmington Hills was recently named one of four new members of the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metropolitan Detroit Board of Directors. She is area manager of Manpower Metro Detroit and a member of both the

Southfield and Detroit chambers of commerce.

**Athlete of the Year**

Hani Abisaid, son of Louis and Randa Abisaid, of Farmington Hills has been named Michigan Athlete of the Year. Abisaid, a senior at St. Mary's Preparatory. As the number four man in the Eagle's varsity 8 crew, his team finished second in the world at the Henley Royal Regatta in England, capping off a brilliant season that saw St. Mary's capture Midwest, U.S. and Canadian championships.

In the fall, the 6-foot-3, 225-pound offensive lineman received All-League, All-Catholic and All-State honors in football. He also plays forward-center in basketball, and this spring is anticipating another successful rowing campaign.

Abisaid has a 4.17 grade-point average and will attend Yale in the fall were he will row and play football. His long range goal is to become a pediatrician.

## Bureau is seeking help for its first phase of Census 2000

The U.S. Census Bureau views the Michigan economy as a good news-bad news situation.

The good news is that Michigan, led by prosperous Oakland County, has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation. The bad news is that the relative lack of job seekers is keeping the Census Bureau from recruiting enumerators for the first phase of Census 2000.

About 2,000 people will be recruited for census jobs in Oakland and western Wayne counties. Block canvassing will begin at the end of this month.

Census "enumerators" will be paid \$11.50 and hour plus 32.5 cents per mile. Most jobs last 6-12 weeks, but opportunity for additional work and promotion are good, said Betty Hughes, Census recruiter.

"We are looking for people who may not necessarily be looking for work," said Hughes. "Since a

great deal of the work is done during evenings and weekends, we hire many people who are already employed and want to supplement their income. These are folks who don't scan the want ads, so we really have to beat the bushes to find them."

Census data is used to distribute more than \$180 billion annually across the nation, Hughes said. Census numbers are also used to determine more federal legislative districts, as well as countless business and marketing plans.

The construction of many institutions and services, from schools to strip malls, is based on demographic information supplied by the Census Bureau.

Anyone interested in Census jobs should call Deirdre West in the Census Bureau's Troy office at (248) 288-4300, or the national office at (888) 325-7733.



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