

ASSEMBLY AGING AND SENIOR SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 2304

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JANUARY 13, 2021

The Assembly Aging and Senior Services Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 2304.

This bill would re-establish the Arthritis Quality of Life Initiative and the Advisory Council on Arthritis in the Department of Human Services (DHS). The initiative and the advisory council were initially established in the Department of Health, through the enactment of the “Arthritis Quality of Life Initiative Act,” at P.L.1999, c.72 (C.26:2V-1 et seq.). In 2012, the Legislature transferred the initiative and the advisory council to the DHS; but only a year later, in 2013, the Legislature repealed the “Arthritis Quality of Life Initiative Act,” on the basis that the advisory council was inactive. This bill would permanently reinstitute the initiative and the council in the DHS, in order to ensure that arthritis continues to be sufficiently addressed in the State.

Specifically, the bill would require the Commissioner of Human Services to re-establish the Arthritis Quality of Life Initiative within 180 days after the bill’s effective date. The purpose of the initiative is to: 1) increase public awareness about arthritis, its symptoms, and available treatment options; 2) publicize options for arthritis prevention; 3) highlight the value of early diagnosis and treatment; and 4) encourage and facilitate the delivery of programs and services that are aimed at preventing arthritis-related complications and improving the quality of life of people with arthritis.

In establishing the initiative, the bill would require the commissioner, at a minimum, to:

- 1) develop, and publicize on the department’s Internet website, a list of health care providers who offer specialized services for persons with arthritis;

- 2) establish, or, if appropriate, authorize and facilitate the re-establishment and ongoing maintenance, of two regionally-based arthritis centers, one in the northern and one in the southern part of the State;

- 3) implement a public information and outreach campaign that includes, but need not be limited to, appropriate educational materials that promote the early diagnosis and treatment of arthritis and other rheumatic diseases;

- 4) implement a professional education program for health care practitioners, which is to promote and endeavor to increase

professional levels of expertise in association with the diagnosis of arthritis and the treatment and care of persons with the disease;

5) identify, and publicize on the department's Internet website, programs and services that are designed to prevent arthritis, reduce complications associated with arthritis, and improve the quality of life of those living with the disease;

6) establish a phone-based referral and support network to help arthritic persons identify appropriate health care providers, legal advocates, and available programs and services; and

7) engage in, or promote and facilitate, the use of outcome-based research designed to improve arthritis care and treatment, and appropriately publicize the findings of such research.

The bill would also re-establish the Advisory Council on Arthritis in the DHS. The purpose of the council would be to advise the commissioner on the development and ongoing implementation and operations of the Arthritis Qualify of Life Initiative.

The council would include 19 members, as follows: the Director of the Division of Aging Services in the Department of Human Services, the Principal Deputy Commissioner of Public Health in the Department of Health, the Director of Population Health in the Department of Health, the Director of the Division on Women in the Department of Children and Families, and the Chair of the New Jersey Interagency Council on Osteoporosis in the Department of Human Services, or their designees, who would each serve ex officio; and 14 public members who have expertise or experience in arthritis or related subject matters, to be appointed by the commissioner.

Each public member of the council would serve for a term of three years, except that, of the members first appointed, four would serve for terms of three years, five would serve for terms of two years, and five would serve for terms of one year. Each member is to hold office for the term of appointment, and until their successor is appointed and qualified. Members are eligible for reappointment to the council.

The council will be required to organize as soon as practicable after the appointment of a majority of its members. The members are to serve without compensation, but may be reimbursed for travel and other necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties, within the limits of funds appropriated or otherwise made available to the council for its purposes.

Not later than 18 months after the bill's effective date, and annually thereafter, the commissioner will be required to submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature describing the activities and accomplishments of the initiative.