Washington
Paid Family & Medical Leave

Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
February 22, 2023, 4:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Location	Zoom
Advisory Committee Members	Director, Leave and Care: Justin DeFour (not present) Paid Family & Medical Leave Act Ombuds: Edsonya Charles Employer's Interests Representative: Bob Battles Employer's Interests Representative: Christine Brewer Employer's Interests Representative: Julia Gorton Employee's Interests Representative: Samantha Grad Employer's Interests Representative: Tammie Hetrick Employee's Interests Representative: Maggie Humphreys Employee's Interests Representative: Joe Kendo Employee's Interests Representative: Gabriela Quintana
Employment Security Department Staff	ESD Commissioner: Cami Feek Deputy Director, Leave and Care: Matt Buelow Chief Financial Officer, ESD: Danielle Cruver Public Affairs Director, ESD: Clare DeLong Government Relations Director, ESD: Caitlyn Jekel Leave and Care Treasury Manager: Steve Zawojsky Operations Manager, Leave and Care: John Mattes (not present) Research & Data Manager, Leave and Care: Rebecca Grady
Guests	ESD Managing Actuary: Eve Sheng Economic Analyst 3, Leave and Care: Brian Kennedy Customer Service Manager, Leave and Care: Rob Rohrer Legislative Coordinator, Leave and Care: Roberta Kowald Transformation Manager, Leave and Care: Alison Eldridge
Notes by	Zoya Spencer, Court Reporter

Agenda	Introductions Approval of January Minutes Program and Financial Update Current Priorities Legislative Session Check-In Workgroup Updates March Meeting Topics Open Comment Adjourn

MR. BUELOW: Welcome, everyone, to the Paid Family and Medical Leave Advisory Committee meeting for February. Let's go ahead and advance slides, I'll talk through the agenda.

So we've got for our agenda today pretty standard, the topics anyway, we'll go into more detail. So we'll do our introductions, our updates, priorities, talk about what's going on legislatively, work groups, talk about any agenda items for next meeting, and then have our open comment period. So we can advance slides, please.

Only the Advisory Committee and presenters should talk during the meeting. We will have an open comment period at the end. So if you are with the public and have something you would like to tell us, if you could just please hold to the end, that would be fantastic. And if we could go one more slide.

So we're going to do our introductions of the advisory committee with who is here. But before we dive into that, I want to ask Eve Sheng, who is our new actuary at Employment Security, if you could come on and introduce yourself to the group, that would be fantastic.

Introductions – Matt Buelow and Advisory Committee Members

MR. BUELOW: Okay. If we could advance slides, please. We sent over January's meeting minutes with materials for this month. I'm hoping folks had a chance to look at those and hopefully they looked okay.

January Minutes were approved unanimously

MR. BUELOW: I'm going to hand it over to Steve Zawoysky, our treasury manager; Brian Kennedy, our forecast and economic analyst; and Rob Rohr, who is one of our customer service managers will be doing the update on operations. John is out sick today. So thank you, Rob for stepping up for that.

MR. ZAWOJSKY: Thank you, Matt. Good afternoon everyone. Go through these finance slides fairly quickly. We have a short meeting time again today.

So, as expected, the end of January we remain in a negative balance and it was a balance of negative 60.3 million. Our quarterly premiums were due on January 31st and we received the bulk of those on February 1st. So actually the last week of January, the first week of February, we saw a pretty high level of premium remittance.

So our maximum deficit was on January 26 of 72 million. And then as we received premiums on February 1st, we received our biggest premium infusion of 151 million that brought us to a positive balance of 85.8 million.

On February 1st and through the first week in February, we continued to receive more premiums than expenses and so our high balance in February so far was on February 7th and that was at 110.9 million. All right. Next slide, please.

This is our quarterly premium and benefits graph here. This has not changed since last month so the data you're seeing for quarter four is representative of December 31st data. This will next be updated at the end of March, so in our April Advisory Committee meeting we will have quarter one 2023 data for this slide. Next slide, please.

Our monthly premiums remitted. Here we see in January we received a total of 250.6 million. This also includes the amount that was in process on January 31st which didn't hit our account until February 1st, that 151 million amount. This is significantly higher than last January, 103.5 million more, which is about

70 percent higher than last year, again due to the premium rate increase in 2022. This will be the last premium collection at the 2022 rate. And so in 2023 in April for our quarter one premium collection, that should be in the ballpark of 30, 35 percent higher than quarter one 2022 based on the 2023 premium increase. Next slide, please.

And this shows our monthly benefits paid. January 2023 was our highest benefits paid to date, 117.3 million, 30 percent higher than January of last year, which sort of tracks with what we've been seeing in the growth in premium payments throughout the at least 2022, 7 percent higher than last month.

And, again, if we look at 2022 in total, we paid out almost $1.2 billion in benefit averaging around a hundred million a month and we were fairly close with our projection.

MR. BUELOW: Steve, you have a question.

MR. KENDO: Is there a story to tell behind the benefit growth? Is that a function of wages, a function of increased claim volume?

MR. ZAWOJSKY: I'm going to defer a bit to Brian on this, but I do know that we have seen higher claim volumes and higher number of applicants, so that's certainly contributing, I would say, to the majority of that, but I'm going to defer to Brian for the remainder of that answer.

MR. KENNEDY: Yes, I would concur with what Steve's saying. We're seeing that volumes have increased. While we did see benefit amounts, like your weekly benefit payments did go up, they wouldn't be hitting until the end of the month because they would have had to applied and get processed and approved before those new benefit payments kicked in. So it's largely a result of volume.

So here we have our fiscal projections out through the end of the biennium. I do want to make a quick note that we did incorporate some updates to this so it may not look exactly the same as what we sent out to you earlier, but generally the big picture is the same. We have extended this through the biennium and in this graph I left in the most recent deficit period so we can kind of compare the one we're just coming out of to the one we're expecting to be hitting it springtime-ish. And I mostly did that because I want you to note that this will be a larger deficit period than we have expected in the past.

As you can see with the way the graph hits there, as we came out of deficit period we had a max of about 109, 110 million in our account at the highest point so we're starting at a lower threshold before we start taking away from that as we work through to our next reporting period. And that's kind of expected, we knew this was going to happen. This collection period was Q4 assessments of last year which are typically the lowest in a rate year anyway. As more folks are hitting that Social Security wage cap, less of their wages are subject to the premium, so our collections are a bit lower. So that's kind of roughly what we're having there. And we're seeing that this high water mark was about 70 million less than last period.

So I'll pause real quick. Maggie has a question here.

MS HUMPHRIES: Thank you. I apologize if this is on the forthcoming slides, but in a couple slides ago it noted that there's yet been any to draw into the $350 million reserve funds. Do you see that with this upcoming deficit that will be, gee, what's the largest yet, do you seen that changing in this term or the next?

MR. KENNEDY: Yes, so we haven't tapped into that 350 million that was set aside. This current deficit, as you can kind of see in the graph, the collections we receive at the end of April will pull us out of that deficit period without having to tap into that. But I did leave this out to the biennium to kind of show you to highlight the fact that at the end of the biennium we are expecting a deficit so we will be tapping into that amount.

But the kind of key take home there is this is going to happen -- the end of the biennium occurs mid deficit period. So while it will make us whole again for a very short period, we won't actually be collecting more premiums until the end of July.

So it will, like, bounce us to positive or break even point, but then we will be back in deficit where we've got to get another note from OFM to allow us to run into that deficit position. But, yes, this very next one through April will be fine, we'll collect enough to pull us out of that.

MR. BATTLES: Okay. Thank you.

MS HETRICK: I just want to make sure I'm following along here. So if we're spending right now about 117 million in January, so that's like 352 million for the next three month if it were to continue, but we've only collected 250 million; so you're saying by July we're going to have collected enough to backfill plus be able to pay future benefits if they continue at that rate?

MR. KENNEDY: So we do -- we have been running into situations where we are collecting enough premiums to pull us out of the deficit, and that's currently what's happening and we expect that to happen.

The collections we should be receiving at the end of April, when that next reporting, should be somewhere around 300 million, so it will pull us out of the deficit without having to tap into that yet. But regardless, at the end of the biennium, if there is any deficit, that's when we'll start tapping into that funding. Okay, so I'll continue on.

So once we get kind of made whole again from pulling into that funding, we will also kind of continue on in deficit period for a bit until new reporting comes due at the end of July.

And then, as it's written, if that's kind of continuing how it goes, we will keep running these short-term deficits. It just kind of depends on what plays out with budget. If they take the whole tax course recommendation and set aside that 350 million entirely, then it kind of changes how that plays out. But currently as it stands, that's what we should expect to see if the short-term deficit hits.

Bob, do you have a question before we move on?

MR. BATTLES: Yes. I wanted to ask, when you say the entirety of the 350, is that what's left or all 350 million? What are you operating on at this point?

MR. KENNEDY: At this point, we're operating on just receiving the negative balance. We haven't incorporated the full 350 million into these projections because we're operating like within the bounds of what the statute says right now.

MR. BATTLES: So just so I understand, then, is that we have the 350 -- so you're not calculating that at all this point, you will consider it if the law passes, which we anticipate, and the budget and all that kind of stuff, but we won't see that until sometime in either April -- I'm assuming in April that you'll start calculating it -- end of April, beginning of May; is that right?

MR. KENNEDY: Yes, that's correct. Our projections thus far incorporate only the amount that's negative in the balance at the end of the biennium.

But if that were to change with budgets like we expect to do, then we will make those adjustments to account for that; but, yes, correct. All right, we can jump to the next slide, I think.

And here we have going into some of our volume situation, as we can see, January was another kind of high water mark. We received over 22,000 applications, which again is the highest on record outside of our initial month when the program launched, so that's kind of a big note that we've seen.

It's about 12 percent higher than we saw last month and about 15 percent more than we saw January of last year. And I went back and did some looking at like December last -- or last December compared to the December prior, so year over a year for the last six months. And we're right in that 15 percent range, so we're not growing exponentially. That 15 percent is kind of what we've been seeing the last six months, so that's good to note. But also we're seeing, you know, that shift towards medical as opposed to family with the changes in the claim type.

And then our three month rolling average broke 20,000 claim applications. This has only happened one other time, which was kind of late summer months where we saw that peak in August. So those late summer months, we saw it peak up over 20,000 claims on a rolling average; but January pushed us above that again. We can jump to the next slide.

And then looking at our approval rates with our paid claims, we're still not a major change here, 84 percent of our claims are being approved. With paid claims, we're seeing that shift towards medical as well as we saw with applications.

And then January, the total number of paid -- unique paid claims in the month was just under 40,000, which is about 25 percent more than last year, and that kind of has been holding right around the year over year growth rate as well.

MS. HUMPHRIES: Have the reasons for denials largely stayed the same? Are there any new trends within that?

MR. KENNEDY: Those largely have stayed the same. It's typically hours and things like that. And we can jump to the next slide.

And this is where we have our first look at our new benefit amounts. So this is looking at our average weekly benefits payments for claims with our claim year starting within that month, and we're seeing the first look at that, which we're seeing January, is about $1,021, which is about 10 percent higher than January of last year.

Again, I want to kind of caution that this is really a preliminary look and it takes a little bit for this data to mature. So in the next coming months we'll see this drop down a little bit. If it follows trend with the past as we look at these, it should fall about 20ish dollars. But we won't really know where that stabilizes out until a couple months from now, but we kind of wanted to give you a good look at that as we go through. And as you know, January is the jump and then it kind of stabilizes for the rest of the year.

And then lengths of leave again following a very similar trend. For the longest time we were sitting at 7.4 weeks on per claim, and then it kind of shifted down to 7.3, and it's hovering around 7.2 in the last six months. And, again, that's right in the change of bonding to a medical leave type, so it's kind of adjusting things there. But not a lot of change in the last six months, so we're still sitting around 7.2 weeks per claim.

MS. GRAD: You said bonding and the switch there that that drops the leaves. But am I wrong, I thought that was the average of both types of leave combined. Is this only one type?

MR. KENNEDY: No, this does incorporate both of them, but the change where that first kind of -- they would have to file a new claim if they wanted to continue on, so it would add a second claim. So we are expecting that claim average length of leave will drop but more claims.

MS. GRAD: Because you're counting them as two different claims instead of one claim. Got it, okay.

MR. KENNEDY: Yes. That's kind of why we're seeing this fall, and it's kind of what we've been anticipating.

MS. GRAD: Okay. It may be helpful if in future months can we maybe see that broken out a little bit between medical and family? I think that might be helpful. I see Julia nodding her head, and Maggie too.

MR. KENNEDY: Yes, we can add that in.

MS. GORTON: I want to make sure we're saying the same thing or maybe this is different. It's helpful to know how long a person is on leave regardless of how many.

MS. GRAD: Yeah, combining them too. If I were to have a baby, a chunk of it's medical, a chunk of it might be bonding. It's helpful to see all medical claims and all bonding claims separated, but then also maybe see a number of like, if I'm out on both of those, you know, how does that change the average as well.

MR. KENNEDY: We can add that in there looking at it by those claim years. I'll make note of that.

And I think, if there's no more questions for me, I'll pass it off to Rob.

MR. ROHR: Thanks, Brian.

We can see that both our average and median weeks to payment have increased somewhat in January, and kind of a number of things behind that. First of all, second half of December with the holidays and kind of our peak employee leave usage offer some challenges.

And then Brian mentioned earlier, we went into January being our highest volume application month on record since January of 2020, only one with more. And on top of that, January has its own challenges with having Q4 reporting, 1099s, and the weekly benefit amount changes, all which take some capacity to manage for customers. So that's the bulk of the impact -- or the cause of the impact that was felt in January.

As we've gone through January, we're mitigating that to the extent we could and continuing to do that in February by really prioritizing the different work items that the folks in operations are working on, and we have been authorizing some overtime in order to continue to help with that.

MS. HUMPHREYS: I don't know if this is on the next slide, but do you have data on the next slide about the weekly claims processing time? Because I had some questions or some facts about that.

MR. ROHR: The next one is on phones. But go ahead with your question, I'll see what I can do to help.

MS. HUMPHRYS: I understand your preview about some of the delays in application review and to payment. I specifically have heard from at least, I think about four parents who had fully approved applications but it took upwards of a month to a month and a half to get their weekly claim -- their first weekly claim approved. And this was from multiple people who were filing claims on -- applications, again, that had already been approved, so it should be a pretty quick process.

So I was wondering if you had some more detailed information about the specific delays within weekly claims or if that matches kind of the data at the aggregate level as well, for pregnancy and bonding leave claims.

MS. GRADY: I'll drop in, Rob, if you're ok with that.

MR. ROHR: Sure.

MS GRADY: I just pulled up the data on weekly claims processing time. We're still pretty low. So, of course, there might be some outliers here or there of specific cases, but the average day between when somebody submits a weekly claim and it gets approved for payment is 1.2 days and our median is zero days. So most people are getting, from when they submit a weekly claim, within a day they are approved. So then it takes another day for the bank processing and whatever time for the bank on their end. But I don't see a noticeable increase happening overall.

MS. HUMPHREYS: Okay, that's great to hear.

MR. ROHR: Alrighty. Any other questions? Or, if not, we'll move on to talk about our phone queues. Can we get the next slide please?

So, first off, we did pull a few months out of this because it was getting to be quite a long list and not really easy to navigate. But if we take a look here, we can see that the percentage of calls into the queue and the calls answered and queue time are staying relatively consistent over the recent months.

And we've seen a 4 percent increase in the calls into the queue since last January and 25 percent increase in calls answered over that year time, and it's really kind of stabilized in some of those numbers over the recent months.

Any questions on that? All right, appreciate it.

MR. BUELOW: Okay. Let's talk about the program's priorities right now.

So I won't read all of these to you, I won't bore you by doing that to you. But you'll see we have many projects that are active that we're currently working through or finalizing. We have three that are in the initiation process, which means we are getting ready to start them, we're figuring out the entirety of the scope, the timelines, those sorts of things.

And I do want to point out a couple in the initiating that I think is going to be really helpful. I'm not going to talk about SFT to MFT, I wouldn't get it right anyway.

So, enable remaining employers to report online. So I think we've talked about before that there is a subset of employers, it's not a lot but enough, that for a variety of reasons don't have their own UBI number to access our system. And so we've been working through how can we make sure that the employers can get into the system, file the wage reports, pay the premiums, people can get the benefits with no hiccups, those sorts of things.

So this is going to be our project to do that.

And then we also are going to be enabling multiple contact types for employers which I think will be really good. Right now currently our system has one employer contact, right, so it's whatever address really comes over from Department of Revenue and it can be changed once.

But we know that there are many employers that for a variety of reasons want different pieces of correspondence or information to go to different places or have different people tell us different information; it might be HR for leave and third party administrator for payroll.

I mean, I don't know, I'm making that up on the spot. But right now we don't have a way to capture that and this will allow us to do that.

And then we have in our To Do, things that we know are coming up and that we're planning do.

You'll see one on there that just says "Leg. session outcomes." I think we have an idea of what those might be, and then we can talk more about how big those are and what we're doing and those sorts of things, if and when the legislation passes.

Any questions on these, Bob?

MS. BATTLES: Yes, thank you. On the leg session outcomes, I know that you're anticipating but not doing anything on them, but I am curious to see, what are you doing in anticipation? We know the rate stuff is going to come through, I know you can't say for sure, but it passed the Senate 49 to nothing.

And then we know that the expectation there, we know that there's an expectation that we're going to have some sort of money in the reserves. And on top of that, the data piece that is being moved forward. Kind of how are you anticipating that in your division of projects?

Because I know that some of those things may end up taking priority or adjusting some of these priorities. How are you doing that now in anticipation of -- instead of waiting until April to see what actually passed, are you doing some preliminary work on that?

MR. BUELOW: Oh, absolutely. We've done the bill analyses, the fiscal notes, right, which is really the process that we as a cabinet level agency go into as a bill is being proposed to say here is how we would implement it, here is how much it would cost, here is how long it would take, and we do plan to get that at that point. But we are also taking a look holistically at all of our projects and sort of where things might fit in.

And I'm going to ask Alison Eldridge, who is managing that for us, to jump on and help me out here a little bit.

MR. BATTLES: And in that answer, Alison, I'm interested in -- I know that you've done your fiscal analysis, but what we don't want to have happen is a year later that we haven't implemented something. And the whole data piece is really important for both employers and employees, so I'm kind of interested in that. So, thank you.

MS. ELDRIDGE: Sure. So in the analysis that we did for the fiscal note, we were pretty specific about all of like the level of effort it would take to get these things done. And so what would potentially happen is that other things that we have not implemented yet would fall further down the priority list, not the data piece and the changes there.

We were also able to make some -- move some things up that I would consider like enabling work, we moved them up in priority because it will make it easier for us to implement some of the things coming out of session potentially. An example of that is the multiple contact types for employers, giving access to particular data elements in an online account, we need to have those kind of security roles and the structure of the account and the contact people associated. So that moved up in priority to make sure we could do the next piece the right way.

Did that answer your question?

MR. BATTLES: I appreciate the answer.

MR. BUELOW: Samantha, I think you're next.

MS. GRAD: Can you explain to me what you mean by partnership to increase equitable benefit access? And I might have a follow up after you do.

MR. BUELOW: Go ahead, Alison.

MS. ELDRIDGE: Yes. So it is a very, sort of limited -- somewhat limited in scope to -- Rebecca and I and others have worked with the Help Me Grow Network for a couple of years, and they invited us to participate in a related project called the (inaudible) Leadership Passion Initiative that they received funding for, so it's really working with those partners to do data analysis and see where we could be targeting increasing access to pay these benefits leveraging this partnership.

But it's really focusing more on sort of the realm of possibilities and scoping a more specific thing to follow on with, because it's within the confines of that grant funding that DCYF receives.

MS. GRAD: That sounds super important and I'm glad we're doing it. I am incredibly frustrated to once again not see the authorized representative thing on the list at all, and I hoped make it was following in that and that's why it's not on the list.

But it's been literally years that I've been saying, hey, can we add this to the list to talk about? And I get why it's not in the active and I even understand why it's not in the initiating and we have important things.

But this not the first time I'm mentioning it and I don't know what I need to say to say, hey, can we have this conversation? But clearly something is not working there, but I really do think it's an important thing for us to discuss

MS. ELDRIDGE: It actually is in the scope of the one below that --

MS. GRAD: Perfect.

MS. ELDRIDGE: -- developing a community engagement model for paid leave benefits.

MS. GRAD: Thank you. I was like, it doesn't have to be on the top of the list, but can we just have it on the list somewhere.

MR. BUELOW: Edsonya.

MS. CHARLES: So my question is, where is the -- we don't have the right name for this -- conditional approval, preapproval, whatever we're calling that as a work title, where is that on this list?

MS. ELDRIDGE: It is not on this list.

MS. CHARLES: Why?

MS. ELDRIDGE: There are a number of things that we want to do, need to do, and then plan to do, that are not on -- the to-do list is not everything that we've to do, it's just sort of the next set of things we expect to be able to begin. So anything that isn't in that next set isn't on the list in terms of -- it's on our to-do list, it's not on the version that is on the slide.

MS. CHARLES: I guess we'll maybe talk off line more about that so I understand the prioritization more, but I don't need to take time up here.

MR. BUELOW: Something I just want to remind the committee, too, is this is a list of our paid leave work that we need to get done, and we are still as a division implementing the WA Cares Fund Program, which I know is not what here to talk about, but I just have to continually remind people -- and there is some of that on this list, but -- which is what Alison was going to say, but we're also working through that as well.

MS. ELDRIDGE: I want to add just a little piece to that. There are things that are largely customer experience improvement areas that align with some of the WA Cares implementation work. So within electing coverage we have to implement the WA Cares Fund, and premiums and wage reporting we have to implement the WA Cares Fund. And so we are working very hard to make as many improvements to the cross-program experience as we can within those kind of mandatory scopes of work.

So we do expect to be able to talk about some improvements for employers, third party administrators and self-employed people coming up as that development progresses.

MR. BATTLES: Alison, I appreciate that about the WA Cares implementation and everything, but I want to just caution that that should not interfere with the Paid Family Medical Leave Program. That is a separate program and it is funded separately, it's not funded through this, and so it shouldn't be affecting this program and its implementation, which we are still waiting for portions to be implemented, so, you know years later.

So I kind of appreciate Samantha's comments earlier about, you know, if things are, I appreciate, in the active list, but we've all got our things that we're waiting for to get past.

So this is not against you or Alison or Matt, but just the concerns continue to raise that I don't want to see WA Care and the long-term care stuff interfere with the Paid Family Medical Leave Program which is a separate program and should be managed separately.

MR. BUELOW: Understood. Thanks, Bob.

Maggie.

MS. HUMPHREYS: I appreciate all the feedback here and also the work you all you are doing to hold all the priorities. The equitable access piece, I guess I assumed that that was the language access piece as well as the Epic Consulting, but I heard you focus on -- I know there was a proviso a while back for Healthy Grow. So is the language piece and the Epic Consulting not part of that, is that just the DCYF? Can you say more about that, Alison?

MS. ELDRIDGE: The Epic is developing a community engagement model for paid leave benefits.

MS. HUMPHREYS: Is the Healthy Grow piece in here? I hope that's a large focus of that the feedback that led to that grant, but is the DCYF Help Me Grow piece on here because of proviso deadline? I'm just curious why that piece is being prioritized.

MS. ELDRIDGE: So the work that we're doing on that is really limited. There's no development work. There's five or six people from the division who are working on it.

So it's just for visibility for our kind of keeping track of all the things that we're doing, but the scope is pretty limited.

It's more of sort of like an analysis project to see what are the right next steps to take for a particular set of customers and investigating avenues for things like whether we could ever get to a point of like automatic enrollment in particular customers that -- Apple Health or things like that. So it's more of a data analysis kind of a project.

MS. HUMPHREYS: Thank you, that's helpful.

MR. BUELOW: If there's no more questions around our current priorities, I'm going to ask Caitlyn Jekel, our government relations director, to talk to you all about how the legislative session is going for us.

MS. JEKEL: Hi everyone, good afternoon. And thanks, Matt.

So you all touched on a few of these throughout the course of the conversation, but I will run us through just a quick reminder of the bills pertaining to PFML that we are tracking this year, and open up for any comments or questions from the group or other priorities that are on your radar that aren't on this list.

So our agency request bill which removes the terminology of "master" and "servant" from Titles 50 and 50A, our unemployment insurance and paid leave program, has passed the House is and is over in Senate Labor and Commerce.

We also have been closely involved in House Bill 1570 that many of you participated in a work group over interim on designing processes for TNC drivers to access paid leave and unemployment insurance, and this bill had its public hearing today in Appropriations.

Senate Bill 5286, you all discussed, which is the outcome of the Legislative Task Force on Paid Leave Premiums, that bill has passed the Senate and is over at House Labor and Workplace Standards. We've got another slide, all right.

You all talked about 5586 which is the bill to expand access that employers can have on understanding claims usage for employees who are participating in paid leave claims.

And finally on our list I included 1502 here, although it didn't ultimately get a hearing. It's our understanding that the underlying policy that this bill was teeing up is likely to be addressed in a budget proviso, and so wanted to keep it on the list and open the floor for the group. I know Maggie has been involved in that one.

So I'm happy to turn it to Maggie to speak about this UW study unless there are other bill commentary or questions that people have on anything else on the list.

MS. HUMPHREYS: Yes, I can quickly provide an update. There has been a proviso submitted which essentially reflects 1502's language, and I know there's been some great feedback about elements of that and how to expand potentially some more employer perspective in the work.

My understanding is that we're hopeful that the underlying study of the administrative data will be funded and I think there's some exciting potential if we can get some additional revenue either from the state or from private partners to look at some more expansive survey work as well.

I just want to thank everyone for your input and collaboration on that piece.

MS. JEKEL: Anything that you all are tracking that we didn't capture here on the list? All right, thank you.

Back to you, Matt.

MR. BUELOW: Okay, thanks. And actually I'm going to hand it back over to Alison to talk about some of our work groups.

MS. ELDRIDGE: Thank you. Next slide.

So for the small employer premium opt-in, we, as a reminder, have the phase one solution in place. We posted the form before the end of the year, and as of last week the technical solutions for that kind of back-end process is in place.

We will start planning the things to work on given calendars during session, holding off a little bit because getting together may be a little difficult at the moment, but we will begin planning that shortly.

Questions?

MS. CHARLES: I'm just curious if any -- I know there was some stuff around about outreach, but have any small employers opted in?

MS. ELDRIDGE: Not as of yet, to my knowledge. I typically get updates and have not been told that anyone has.

MR. BUELOW: Do we have any other questions or comments? If we could advance slides.

So we are planning to meet -- Maggie, go ahead.

MS. HUMPHREYS: Sorry, Matt, but I was expecting the next slide to be maybe about some of the other work groups. So based on the prior conversation and Edsonya's question, is the conditional approval work group kind of suspended at this point or is that something that's being, maybe not prioritized, but is there new work happening on that right now.

MR. BUELOW: Alison?

MS. ELDRIDGE: We have not done a time analysis in preparation for the next meeting. I do need to talk to Matt and Justin about kind of what steps to take with that given what is likely to be the work that we have coming our way after session in kind of balance with other priorities. I'm not sure how much we want to or are able to commit to doing at the present time, so we'll have to get back to you on that.

MR. BUELOW: Any other questions? Okay.

So next month we're planning to meet on the 22nd of March, again from 4:00 to 5:00, and we will have definitely our standard agenda. Are there other agenda items -- and I'm including legislative session as standard during legislative session, by the way.

Are there any other topics of interest that the committee would like us to bring next month?

MS. GRAD: I think a little more clarity on the question Maggie just asked would be helpful.

MR. BUELOW: Can do. Bob.

MR. BATTLES: I would like more detail on actual implementation of the legislative stuff that's coming in.

I would like a little more detail on what you really -- make some assumptions that it's our hope that the data will pass, it's our hope that the budget will pass, it's our hope that -- you know, and so that we can have some ideas on implementing things so we know what is going to happen, as opposed to waiting until April to have at least a little more detail on what's being done to prepare.

MR. BUELOW: Sounds good. Anything else?

MR. BATTLES: One more thing, Matt. Also a little more explanation possibly on the interplay between the WA Cares and Paid Family Medical Leave on how much time is being taken --

because, I mean, since WA Cares is not funded at this point, where is the work being done and under what fund is that work being done?

You say it's under general fund and not related, but if it's coming out of Paid Family Medical Leave, I'd like to understand what that is.

MR. BUELOW: It is not coming out of Paid Family Medical Leave.

MR. BATTLES: And if it's taking a bounty for you to get your stuff done from your staff, I'd be interested in that.

MR. BUELOW: We can talk about that.

MS. HUMPHREYS: I echo Bob's suggestion. This might be easy to do over email, but I would love an update about where the Epic consulting project is at. I know there was some conversation, I believe at the end of the year/beginning of the year, about some interviews that would be taking place with stakeholders.

I would love an update of where that consulting project is and what some of the next steps are. I'm happy to do that over email if that's easier too.

MR. BUELOW: Sounds good. We'll talk about it and get you an update one way or the other.

Anything else? Okay.

And now I want to open it up for public comment.

So if you have a comment, if you have the ability, please raise your hand so we can call on people. If you are not able to do that, you can type a comment into the chat as well. And if you are only on the phone, it's hard, but try to jump in when there's a little bit of a break so we can hear from you.

Any comments? I'm not seeing anything. Okay, if there are no comments, then we will adjourn five minutes early.

So thank you everyone for attending today's meeting. Thank you especially to the committee for being here and talking through things with us. We will talk to you all next month. Thank you so much.