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BILL ANALYSIS

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House Bill 4726 (Substitute S-1 as reported)  
Sponsor: Representative Leslie Mortimer  
House Committee: Education  
Senate Committee: Education

Date Completed: 10-26-05

### **RATIONALE**

Meningitis is a serious and rapidly progressing infection of the spinal fluid, which can be caused by several strains of bacteria or by a virus. Bacterial meningitis is much more serious than viral meningitis, and more likely to be fatal. The most common strains of bacterial meningitis in the U.S. are meningococcal, pneumococcal, and Hib. Of the three, meningococcal meningitis is the most common strain infecting toddlers, adolescents, and young adults, and one of the most serious strains of the disease. Meningococcal meningitis is fatal in 10% to 15% of cases, according to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders. The disease is contagious and can be contracted primarily through coughing, kissing, or sharing drinking glasses or eating utensils with an infected person. Youths in close proximity to an infected person, such as in a day-care center, a classroom, or a college dormitory, are at elevated risk of contracting the disease.

Because the disease progresses rapidly, early detection and treatment are important to minimize the risk of death or serious aftereffects, which can include hearing loss, brain damage, kidney disease, or loss of limbs. The early symptoms of meningitis include sudden fever, severe headache, and a stiff neck, developing over one to two days. As the disease progresses, a person may experience nausea, vomiting, sensitivity to light, seizures, and a distinctive purple rash. Meningococcal meningitis may be treated with antibiotics, which if administered quickly enough, can reduce the risk of death or serious aftereffects substantially. Vaccines for

meningococcal meningitis are also available for people between the ages of 11 and 55.

There have been efforts in Michigan to increase public awareness of meningitis. Public Act 163 of 2001 amended the Public Health Code to require the Department of Community Health to make available to colleges, universities, and high schools information about meningococcal meningitis, including information on the risks of the disease and the availability, effectiveness, and potential risks of immunization against it. That Act has helped to make people more aware of the disease in adolescents and young adults, but meningitis can strike younger children as well. It has been suggested that information on the disease be made available to parents of school-age children starting in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

### **CONTENT**

**The bill would amend the Revised School Code to require the board of a school district or board of directors of a public school academy (PSA) to distribute to parents information about meningococcal meningitis and the vaccine for that disease under certain circumstances.**

**The Department of Education, in cooperation with the Department of Community Health, would have to develop and make available to school districts, PSAs, and nonpublic schools information about meningococcal meningitis.**

Specifically, the bill provides that if, at the beginning of a school year, the board of a school district or board of directors of a PSA provided information on immunizations, infectious disease, medications, or other school health issues to parents in at least grades 6, 9, and 12, then with that information the board would have to include information about meningococcal meningitis and the vaccine for the disease. The information would have to include the causes and symptoms of the disease, how it is spread, and sources where parents and guardians could obtain additional information about meningococcal meningitis and could obtain vaccination of a child against the disease.

The Department of Education, in cooperation with the Department of Community Health, would have to develop and make available to school districts, PSAs, and nonpublic schools the information specified in the bill, in the manner the Department of Education determined to be the most cost-effective and programmatically-effective, which would have to include at least posting the information on its website.

Proposed MCL 380.1177a

### **ARGUMENTS**

*(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)*

### **Supporting Argument**

Although meningitis is a serious and potentially deadly disease, many parents know little about it. Early detection and treatment of this rapidly progressing disease are crucial to minimize its effects. By requiring schools to make parents aware of the early symptoms and available treatment options (if the schools provided other health-related information), the bill would help parents catch the disease in its early stages, potentially saving lives and preventing some of the more serious aftereffects of the disease.

Additionally, providing parents with information on vaccines for meningitis would enable them to take action to prevent their children from being infected and slow the spread of the disease. Recently developed vaccines are highly effective in protecting an individual from contracting meningitis.

According to the National Meningitis Association, 15% of the population carry the bacteria that cause meningitis in their throats or nasal passageways without being affected by the disease. The vaccine can eliminate the bacteria in these carriers as well, preventing the bacteria from spreading further. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently recommended routine vaccination of adolescents at the age of 11 to 12, at high school entry, and at their freshman year in college. The bill would help make parents aware of recommendations such as these, and help prevent the spread of this disease.

Legislative Analyst: Curtis Walker

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

The Departments of Education and Community Health would face increased costs associated with the development and dissemination of the meningitis information required in this legislation.

School districts currently providing information on immunizations, infectious disease, medications, or other health issues to pupils in at least grades 6, 9, and 12 would see minimal increased costs (such as the cost of paper and additional postage, if applicable) associated with the distribution of meningitis information as the bill would require.

Fiscal Analyst: Kathryn Summers-Coty

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.