

Health insurance to be mandatory in Mass.

April 5 2006

Massachusetts is poised to become the first state to require mandatory health insurance coverage under the risk of fines.

Tuesday's votes approving the bipartisan bill -- 154 to 2 in the House and 37 to 0 in the Senate -- were the culmination of two years of negotiations, the Washington Post said. Republican Gov. Mitt Romney supports the measure, although he hinted he may exercise his line-item veto on some elements.

All residents will have to purchase coverage by July 1, 2007, and provide details about their policy on their state income tax returns in 2008. Those who do not have insurance would first lose their personal state tax exemption and later face penalties equal to half the cost of the cheapest policy they should have bought.

Those earning less than the federal poverty threshold would be able to purchase subsidized policies that have no premiums, and would be responsible for very small co-payments for emergency-room visits and other services.

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