



Florida Children's Services Council

Capitol Connection

News from our State and Nation's Capitol about children and families

Week 3

March 23, 2007

2007 Legislative Report for Week of March 19

The House and Senate are busy preparing their respective appropriations bills, which will be made available early next week. The budgets are several weeks ahead of schedule from previous years. Preliminary recommendations from the Senate Appropriations Committees indicate the following funding recommendations for key children's issues:

- KidCare Outreach Matching Grant program: \$1 Million;
- Foster Care - New General Revenue: \$11 million to be distributed according to the equity formula used last year for CBCs under the dollar per child statewide average (Districts 1,2,3,4 14, 15);
- APD: A number of reductions are recommended including caps on services to existing clients in an effort to deliver services to those on the waiting list;
- Affordable Housing: Restoration of Homeless Housing Assistance Trust fund budget authority: \$2 Million;
- CMS KidCare: \$41.7 Million;
- Healthy Kids: \$18 million (which brings available federal match to a total of \$55Million);
- CMS Medicaid Reform Pilot: \$13.2 Million;
- Healthy Start Coalitions: \$4.9 Million;
- Early Steps: \$2,6 Million;
- Independent Living: 0 recommended (\$9.3 Million recommended by the Governor)
- Early Learning- Pre-K: \$376 Million;
- QRS: \$500,000 (non-recurring)
- CCDBG: \$22.3 Million.

The Senate released the full text for its Appropriation Proposed Committee Bills (S 7096-7106), and proposed committee substitutes to implementing and conforming bills. All appropriations PCBs are scheduled to be heard by their respective Appropriation Committee on Wednesday, March 28, 2007.

Property Tax Reform

The House of Representatives continues working on a two-pronged approach to property tax reform. Many bills moved forward this week including a proposed joint resolution that would allow for an amendment to the Florida Constitution. It's an extremely political and complicated scenario and the FCSC lobbying team and members of the Firm continue to track developments closely.

CS/HB 7001 now includes an exemption for children's services independent special districts created pursuant to s. 125.901. This bill, which originally called for a roll back of millage rates to 2001, now includes a methodology for the roll-back and many other provisions. The bill passed favorably out of the House Budget and Policy Council on Friday, March 16, with 24 yeas and 7 nays and moves to the floor for a vote in the coming week.

The House also continues to move on its proposal to amend the state's constitution. **Proposed Council Bill 01 Property Tax Reform** which, if passed, would repeal a portion of the property tax to be replaced by a 1% sales tax. Additionally, local governments would be required to hold two separate referenda by November 2010 which might result in total repeal of property tax to be replaced with an additional 1.5% sales tax. This measure was heard in the House Policy and Budget Council on Wednesday. It includes a provision that special districts **may** be authorized by law to levy ad valorem taxes and may be authorized by general law to levy other taxes for their respective purposes, except ad valorem taxes on intangible personal property and taxes prohibited by the Constitution.

The Senate Finance and Tax Committee conducted a workshop on property tax reform alternatives on Wednesday. They continue to deliberate about the property valuation options. It is unclear when the Senate proposals will be unveiled, although some believe that it will not be until the week of April 9th, after the Easter/Passover break.

Summary: Many believe that the most likely scenario is the imposition of tax or expenditure caps, but without information from the Senate, it is impossible to predict what combination of ideas and/or reforms will be enacted. Florida Children's Services Council staff and lobbyists will continue to inform legislators and staff about the unique contributions of CSCs to children and to press for exemptions from any property tax reform for both independent and dependent special districts.

KidCare

The House Committee on Healthy Families work shopped **PCB HCC 07-04 relating to KidCare** on March 20. The bill removes some of the administrative barriers currently in the program, but also revises program eligibility and allows increased participation by managed care providers.

Significant testimony was offered concerning the following: not limiting Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) benefits available under the current Medicaid for children program and the need to increase current grassroots outreach efforts and coordinate those through the Department of Health as opposed to the Department of Children and Families. Committee Chair Bill Galvano (R-Bradenton) pledged to incorporate requested revisions in the next version of the bill that will be heard next in the Healthcare Council.

SB 930 by Sen. Dawson (D-Ft. Lauderdale) is scheduled to be heard in the Senate Government and Operations Committee next week.

TAKE ACTION: Please contact Rep. Aaron Bean (R-Fernandina Beach), chair of the House Healthcare Council and request that he support a KidCare bill that streamlines the process and removes administrative barriers, increases outreach funding and efforts under the Department of Health, and does not reduce the amount, duration and scope of benefits currently offered by the Medicaid program.

Quality Rating System (QRS)

HB 1107 by Rep. Lorrane Ausley (D-Tallahassee) passed the House K-12 Committee with a unanimous vote of 6-0, and is now waiting to be heard in the Schools and Learning Council. The bill establishes the Florida Sunshine Stars Quality Rating System (QRS), a voluntary rating system in AWI. It also provides quality rating requirements for early learning programs, child care facilities and facilities participating in voluntary Pre-kindergarten Education Program, and establishes voluntary pilot programs in Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, Hillsborough, Orange, Pinellas, Duval and Leon Counties. The bill was amended to remove the appropriation for the purpose of moving the bill along. The funding will be dealt with in the appropriations bill. The bill will be heard by the Schools and Learning Council on Tuesday, March 27. The companion is **SB2226** which is in the Senate Education Pre K committee.

Child Care Services for Children in the Dependency System

HB 1543 passed the Economic Development Committee with a unanimous vote of 6-0 on March 20. The bill now moves to the Economic and Infrastructure Council. HB 1543 provides legislative intent that children under jurisdiction of the circuit court receive priority consideration for placement into gold seal child care centers, and requires these centers to notify the legal guardian if the center is unable to accept the child due to limited capacity.

Booster Seats

HB 443, the Child Passenger Safety Act by Rep. Thad Altman (R-Melbourne), passed unanimously in the House Infrastructure Committee on March 20. HB 443 requires the use of a booster seat for children between the ages of 4 and 7, requires car rental companies to provide notification of the law to persons renting vehicles, and appropriates \$200,000 to the Department of Transportation for a public awareness campaign. The bill now goes to the Economic Expansion and Infrastructure Council. Unfortunately, neither one of the Senate bills have yet to be heard.

TAKE ACTION: Please contact Sen. Bill Posey (R-Rockledge) and ask that he request a hearing on **SB 2048** as soon as possible.

Children and Youth Cabinet Act

HB 509 by Rep. Lorraine Ausley (D-Tallahassee) creates a Children and Youth Cabinet to coordinate children's services and develop a coordinated children's budget. The bill passed unanimously in the Healthy Families Committee on March 20, and now goes to the Healthcare Council. Similarly, **SB 564 by Sen. Nan Rich** (D-Sunrise) was unanimously approved by the Senate Committee on Children, Families and Elder Affairs on March 21.

Magic City Children's Zone

HB 1041 by Rep. Dorothy Bendross-Mindingall (D-Miami) was approved by the Healthy Families Committee by a vote of 8-0, and is now waiting to be heard in the Healthcare Council. The bill creates a 10-year pilot project children's zone in Liberty City modeled after the long-established and successful Harlem Children's Zone. The pilot will create a full-service community network that includes preschools, schools, after-school programs, community centers, and places of worship, housing and employment initiatives. This is for the purpose of developing, coordinating and delivering integrated support and services through the availability of quality education, accessible health care youth development programs, opportunities for employment and safe and affordable programs.

Florida 211 Network

SB 212 by Sen. Evelyn Lynn (R-Daytona Beach) passed the Health Policy Committee on March 21 with a vote of 6-0. SB 212 requires the Florida 211 Network to provide services in each county and to coordinate services with county emergency management agencies during disasters. A \$5 million appropriation is provided to be distributed by a formula to participating counties and subject to local matching funds.

Side Notes

FCSC Open House in Tallahassee

The Open House at the FCSC office in Tallahassee is next week on Thursday, March 29, in conjunction with the two-day FCSC board meeting. Key dignitaries have been invited, including the Governor, legislators, department agency heads and members from various advocate organizations. Also, the counties, cities and school boards associations will be in Tallahassee for their legislative days, and it is Children's Week.

The Capitol Connection is brought to you by The Firm, composed of CSC legislative liaisons from around the state. Contributors to this issue are: Firm Chair Diana Ragbeer, Director of Public Affairs and Communications with The Children's Trust (diana@thechildrenstrust.org) and Amy Petril, Director of Public Policy & Advocacy at the Children's Board of Hillsborough County (APetrila@childrensboard.org).