



## Florida Children's Services Council

# Capitol Connection

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

Week 4

March 30, 2007

### 2007 Legislative Report for Week of March 26

Week four in Tallahassee proved to be one of the busiest legislative weeks yet with a myriad of events taking place around the Capitol, including Children's Week, the FCSC Board of Directors meeting, and legislative days for the counties, cities and school boards associations. Tallahassee also played brief host this week to two presidential hopefuls – U.S. Sen. John McCain and Sen. Barack Obama – in town for different fundraising events.

Both the House and Senate released preliminary budgets as committees begin to amend the building blocks of the state's \$70 billion-plus spending plan. House and Senate versions are a billion dollars apart. They must reach agreement by the end of session.

#### FCSC News

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Children's Services Councils were well represented in Tallahassee this week with council CEOs and their board chairs in town for the FCSC Board Meeting and Open House. CSC representatives attended a legislative briefing early Thursday morning to hear from the FCSC legislative team on property tax reform, KidCare, VUPK, and QRIS, as well as projections on House and Senate appropriations. Following the morning briefing, CSC representatives went to the Capitol for meetings with Senate President Ken Pruitt, DCF Secretary Bob Butterworth and DJJ Secretary Walt McNeil.

CSC members urged Senate President Pruitt to remain vigilant in protecting CSCs from unintended consequences of property tax reform measures that could negatively affect their ability to fund children's services. In their meeting with Secretary Butterworth, CSC representatives emphasized the importance of building partnerships among the agency, CSCs and local affiliates to better serve Florida's children.

Secretary McNeil shared his priorities for DJJ with CSC members, and talked with them about ways to enhance prevention efforts through cooperative local initiatives.

Following the group meetings, CSC executives and board chairs spent the remainder of the day on their own meeting with legislators from local delegations, as well as key bill sponsors and committee members. Thursday evening, CSC members hosted an Open House in the FCSC's brand new Tallahassee office, one block from the Capitol. A number of advocacy groups attended the event and had an opportunity to talk with CSC leadership from around the state.



CSC executives, board chairs and FCSC staff met with Senate President Ken Pruitt (far left) on March 29 to talk about property tax reform and other FCSC legislative priorities.

## Property Tax Reform

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Senate Democrats, led by Sen. Steve Geller (D-Cooper City), released a wide-ranging tax reform plan on March 27, which includes elements from all of the other plans released to date. The Senate Democrats' plan does not include elimination of property taxes or increases in sales tax, but does seek to eliminate the tax inequities caused by Save Our Homes, including a portability measure that would exempt or limit taxes on the difference between the values of a homeowner's old and new home. Portability is linked to provisions that would reduce the tax benefits to homesteads by allowing taxes to increase annually by 3 percent, plus inflation, but no more than 6 percent. This would mean more taxes for homesteaded property owners and is likely to meet resistance from House Republicans. Any changes to the homestead act would require voter approval. The Geller plan would reduce property tax revenue by \$1.14 billion in the first year and does not address special districts. Senate President Pruitt told CSC representatives during their meeting with him Thursday that the Senate will release its tax reform proposal in Week 7 of the Legislative Session.

**HB 7001**, which contains an exemption from the roll-back of ad valorem property taxes for independent special districts, was placed on the House calendar on March 26 and will be debated on the floor in the coming weeks.

## KidCare

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There has been a flurry of activity recently around KidCare legislation. **SB 930** by Sen. Mandy Dawson (D-Ft. Lauderdale) passed unanimously through Government Operations on Thursday. The Governor released his version of a KidCare bill, which is currently under review by the FCSC legislative team. The Governor's bill adds another approach to the two proposals already in play. FCSC team members and other advocates plan to meet Monday, April 2, to complete a side-by-side comparison of the different versions.

## Appropriations

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Legislative members deliberated this week on the state's \$70 billion plus budget. Many proposals request non-recurring funds, since recurring dollars are scarce. House and Senate budgets are roughly \$1 billion apart, but either budget represents a decline in spending for the upcoming year. The Legislature also plans to use \$545 million in new property tax revenue to increase public school spending for class size reduction and textbooks.

Senate members are recessed until April 9. Sen. Lisa Carlton (R-Osprey), President Pro Tempore, issued instructions to members on Thursday. Both the General Appropriations Bill (**SB 2800**) and the Appropriations Implementing Bill (**SB 2802**) were distributed Friday, March 30. Amendments must be filed by April 10, and the budget will be considered by the Senate on April 11, 2007, along with conforming bills.

In the House, the Policy and Budget Council met Friday and considered the House General Appropriation Act and amendments. Amendments for debate on the floor must be submitted to the Policy and Budget Council by April 5 and will be available on April 9. House Councils will continue to meet on April 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> to consider additional bills.

*This issue of Capitol Connection brought to you by The Firm, composed of legislative liaisons with CSCs around the state. Please contact Firm Chair Diana Ragbeer, Director of Public Affairs and Communications with The Children's Trust at [diana@thechildrenstrust.org](mailto:diana@thechildrenstrust.org) or Vivian Alarcon, CEO, Florida Children's Services Council at [valarcon@floridacsc.org](mailto:valarcon@floridacsc.org) with questions regarding legislative issues in this newsletter.*