



Florida Children's Services Council

Capitol Connection

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

Week 9

May 4, 2007

2007 Legislative Report for Week of April 30

What began as a legislative session full of promise and new beginnings has ended in disappointment on many levels with a number of pivotal issues for Floridians, including property tax reform and KidCare, left unresolved. Despite commendable efforts by children's advocates, and a bipartisan effort by the Florida House, CFO Alex Sink and Gov. Crist, proposals to repair the ailing KidCare program died inexplicably in the Senate this week. The biggest disappointment will be the hundreds of thousands of needy children who will go without health care coverage for another year, not to mention the millions of dollars in federal funds that Florida will lose. A small glimmer of hope suggests the bill may be taken up in Special Session.

Property tax reform was another disappointment this session with legislators unable to agree on a compromise after months of meetings, committee hearings and town hall trips. Rather than rush to implement a high-risk solution, legislators will return to Tallahassee in June to spend more time on a complex issue that demands greater deliberation.

KidCare

On Tuesday, May 2, Senate President Pruitt announced that the Senate would not take up a KidCare bill. The House bill, **HB 7189**, passed weeks earlier on April 25 with a 98-14 vote, continued to sit in Senate Messages. Similarly, **SB 930**, which passed unanimously in the Health and Human Services Appropriations Committee on April 17, was never received for placement on the Senate calendar.

While a KidCare bill was not passed during the regular session, the chances of a narrow KidCare bill being passed during Special Session, slated for June 12-22, are good. Gov. Crist and House leadership are anxious to see this happen.

The bill that will likely be taken up during the Special Session will be limited to simplification and streamlining of the program, with the agency consolidation, expansion to additional populations, and changes in benefit packages to wait for the next regular session.

TAKE ACTION: Please thank Sen. Mandy Dawson for her efforts with SB 930. Similarly, please thank the following House Members for their leadership on the House bill: Reps Bill Galvano, Lorraine Ausley, Rene Garcia and Aaron Bean. Finally, but not least, please thank Gov. Crist for his leadership in developing a KidCare package. Urge the Governor to expand the call for Special Session so that Florida can provide health care access to more of its uninsured children, as well as send a strong message to Washington that Florida is ready for an expansion to the SCHIP program.

Property Tax Reform

Both the House and Senate announced a special session beginning Tues., June 12, to resolve the issue of Property Tax Reform after the two chambers could not agree on a plan. The Special Session is scheduled to last 10 days, but may likely be shorter with most of the details agreed to between now and the start of Special Session.

The Senate is seeking a five-year property tax cut of approximately \$13 billion, while the House has a stated goal of \$50 billion in cuts. The two chambers have informally agreed upon making Save Our Homes portable in some form, and have a handshake agreement on an exemption for at least the first \$25,000 on tangible personal property tax for Florida businesses.

Appropriations

The House and Senate approved the state's 2007-2008 FY budget on Thurs., May 3. Below are highlights of the allocations for health and human service programs.

ISSUE	LAST YEAR	FY 07-08	COMMENT
VUPK <ul style="list-style-type: none"> PreK Quality 	\$388.1 million (\$2,560 per student)	\$376,033,624 (\$2,611 per student) \$500,000	Increase of \$51 per student
School Readiness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HIPPY 	\$658.5 M	\$658.5 M \$2.4 M	Same as last year
Early Steps	\$5 million (Additional)	\$1.6 million in federal funding authority	Slight increase in spending authority
Florida Healthy Kids (AHCA—KidCare)	-\$50.2 million	\$418,847,259	Increase of \$18 million generates \$54.6 million with federal match
KidCare Slots	-\$50 million	\$18 million	With the federal match, yields approx. \$55 million for 33,000 children
KidCare Outreach	\$1 million	\$1 million	Same as last year
Title IV-E		\$3.1 million	Increase allocated in proviso
CBC Equity (Additional)	\$20 million	\$3 million additional	Increase allocated in proviso
Healthy Start (Additional)	\$6.5 million - earns \$4.5 million federal funds	\$3.0 M	Increase to be distributed using 2006-07 methodology
Additional Agency for Persons with Disabilities Deficit		\$126.3 M	Proviso includes prioritization of children in child welfare system
Healthy Families Expansion		\$2.2 million	Increase in non-recurring
Independent Living (Additional)	\$5 million	\$1 M	
Maintenance Adoption Subsidies/ Adoption promotion	\$2.3 million	\$5.6 M	

Guardian ad Litem (Additional)	\$8 million		Same as last year
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Children’s Cabinet

HB 0509 sponsored by Rep. Lorrane Ausley (D-Tallahassee) and its companion in the Senate sponsored by Sen. Nan Rich (D-Sunrise) passed their respective chambers and are on the Governor’s desk awaiting his signature. The Children’s Cabinet will begin meeting no later than October 1, 2007, and is charged with developing a strategic plan “to achieve the goals of the shared and cohesive vision” for children no later than December 31, 2007. It also includes a provision that the Governor may appoint an Advisory Board to assist the Cabinet in its tasks. The Cabinet includes cabinet-level appointees and five members representing children and youth advocacy organizations who are not service providers and who are appointed by the Governor.

Infant Mortality

HB 1269 sponsored by Rep. Betty Reed (D-Tampa) and its companion bill, **SB 2120**, sponsored by Sen. Arthenia Joyner (D-Tampa) passed both houses and, if signed, will provide legislative intent and funding (\$1 million non-recurring) for the Black Infant Health Practice Initiative to be administered by Healthy Start Coalitions in one urban and one rural county.

Independent Living

SB 2114 sponsored by Sen. Nan Rich (D-Sunrise) and its companion bill, **HB 1215**, sponsored by Rep. Rich Glorioso (R-Plant City) is on its way to Gov. Crist for signature. If signed into law, the bill makes numerous improvements in the independent living program, including allowing caseworkers to sign a foster child’s application for a driver’s license, amending the eligibility requirements for independent living transition services and the Road To Independence program to include youth adopted from foster care or placed with a dependency guardian after age 16, clarifying that foster parents cannot be held responsible for the actions of a child who is engaged in age-appropriate activities that are part of their written plan, requiring that children be formally evaluated for placement in subsidized independent living arrangements between age 16 and age 18, clarifying that children who have earned a high school diploma or equivalent are eligible for the Road To Independence program, and adding provisions for youth over age 16 to obtain checking and savings accounts.

Child Safety

SB 2 by Sen. Mandy Dawson (D-Ft. Lauderdale) changes existing law by making it a second-degree misdemeanor, rather than a non-criminal traffic infraction, if a child is observed to be left unattended in a vehicle for more than 15 minutes. It also makes it a third-degree felony if a child sustains great bodily harm, permanent disability, or permanent disfigurement. The bill passed the Senate on April 18 by a 37-2 vote. The House took up the Senate version of the companion bill sponsored by Rep. Joe Gibbons (D-Hallandale Beach), and on May 3 approved the measure by a 67-46 margin. The legislation now goes to Gov. Crist for his signature.

FCSC and Other News

Find Out What’s New at the 2007 CSCF Conference – A variety of educational and networking opportunities are planned for the 2007 CSCF Conference, scheduled May 21-23, at the Orlando Omni ChampionsGate Hotel. Learn about maximizing local dollars. Hear from legislative veterans about the changing political climate. Join your peers to learn more about collaborative initiatives to create quality afterschool programs. Register today to attend these and many more educational sessions planned for the conference.

Don’t forget to reserve your hotel room soon. While the special room rate cut-off date has passed, be sure to still mention that you are with the CSCF Conference. For details on the conference agenda, registration and hotel information, visit: <http://www.peopleware.net/index.cfm?siteID=457&eventDisp=CSC07>

CSC of Palm Beach County Honored with Impact Award -- At its Spring Philanthropy Conference, the Donor's Forum of South Florida awarded the Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County and the Quantum Foundation with its 2007 Impact Award for grants in the \$100,000 - \$500,000 range. The award-winning grants by the two funders went to the American Red Cross Greater Palm Beach Chapter for the "Learn-To-Swim" program. The program provided almost 3,000 swim lessons, trained 33 lifeguards and 18 water safety instructors in a rural area of the county known as the Glades.

New Address for CSC of St. Lucie County – Effective Monday, May 14, the CSC of St. Lucie County will have a new address following their move to a new office building. Please be sure to update your address books:

546 NW University Blvd., Suite 201
Port St. Lucie, FL 34986

Speaker Pelosi Announces Children's Summit – U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi will convene a National Summit on America's Children in Washington that will feature national experts and practitioners speaking to legislators about effective strategies for supporting young children and their families in the areas of early childhood development, health, and family income support. The Summit will take place in D.C. on Tuesday, May 22, and will be chaired by Reps. George Miller, Rosa DeLauro, and Chaka Fattah.

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