



## **Keeping Current @ the Capitol February 15, 2010**

Legislators have completed 17 of 40 legislative days and are nearing the half-way point of the 2010 Session. The House and Senate will be in session Tuesday through Thursday of this week. Although relatively few bills have passed either chamber, there has been a great deal of activity at the committee level. Budget work is progressing.

### **BUDGET UPDATE**

The House passed its version of the Amended FY 2010 budget last Thursday, and the Senate is expected to act by the end of this week. After Senate passage, a House-Senate conference committee will begin meeting to resolve the differences between the two versions.

State revenues continue to decline. Revenues for January were 8.7 per cent below January 2009. State revenues for this fiscal year are running 12.9 per cent less than FY 2009 revenues. The continued downward trend in revenues means that unless the trend is reversed, the state may face a deficit of \$200 to \$300 million by the end of the current fiscal year, which ends June 30, 2010.

Work is expected to begin on the FY 2011 budget next week. There is widespread reluctance to move forward with a hospital tax proposed by Gov. Perdue, but without this source of revenue, legislators must either make additional cuts or find other sources of revenue.

### **HMHB Legislative Agenda Update**

#### **Protect funding for the Babies Born Healthy Program**

The House version of the Amended FY 2010 budget includes an 8 percent cut to Babies Born Healthy. The cut was made by the House Appropriations Health Subcommittee, and the explanation was that Babies Born Healthy was one program that had not been cut in FY 2010. Babies Born Healthy is the only government program that pays for prenatal care for low income pregnant women who do not qualify for Medicaid, and in recent years the program has consistently run out of funds before the fiscal year ends. Women

who are eligible, but are not served due to lack of funds, usually end up appearing at a hospital to deliver their baby having had no prenatal care.

HMHB is checking with public health districts throughout Georgia, and most, if not all, counties receive such limited funding for this important program that the funds are exhausted almost as soon as they are received. Cutting the funding for Babies Born Healthy this late in the fiscal year is virtually impossible as the funds have already been spent or allocated.

**ACTION NEEDED:** The Amended FY 2010 budget has passed the House and is expected to pass the Senate by the end of this week. As soon as the budget passes the Senate, a House-Senate conference committee will be appointed to resolve differences between the two versions of the Amended FY 2010 budget. **In the meantime, please contact the following legislators to request that the 8% cut to Babies Born Healthy in the Amended FY 2010 budget be restored.**

**House Appropriations Chair Ben Harbin**

Capitol Office: 404-463-2247

Email: [ben.harbin@house.ga.gov](mailto:ben.harbin@house.ga.gov)

**Senate Appropriations Chair Jack Hill**

Capitol Office: 404- 656-5038

Email: [jack.hill@senate.ga.gov](mailto:jack.hill@senate.ga.gov)

**Other Legislation of Interest to HMHB**

**HB 955** (Rep. Pedro Marin, 96<sup>th</sup>) would allow income eligible children and pregnant women who are **legal** immigrants to qualify for Medicaid or PeachCare without the current 5 year wait. **Status:** Assigned to House Health and Human Services.

**SB 329** (Sen. Judson Hill, 32<sup>nd</sup>) and **SB 330** (Sen. Preston Smith, 52<sup>nd</sup>) would allow dependent children to remain on their parents' insurance through age 25 whether or not they are students. **Status:** Both are assigned to Senate Insurance and Labor.

**SB 304** (Sen. Renee Unterman, 45<sup>th</sup>) would set the minimum age of prostitution at 16 (the legal age of consent in Georgia). The purpose of the legislation is to treat young girls who are commercially sexually exploited by being prostituted as victims of child abuse rather than criminals. This would allow diversion for treatment or therapy. **Status:** A committee substitute is being drafted for SB 304. Instead of changing Georgia's prostitution criminal code section, child victims of sexual exploitation would be dealt with as "unrulies" in juvenile courts. The revised language ensures child victims are eligible for much needed treatment and services. **Status:** Assigned to Senate Judiciary.

Prepared for HMHB by Mary Frances Williams.