



healthy mothers, healthy babies

HEALTHY MOTHERS, HEALTHY BABIES

Coalition of Georgia

**Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition of Georgia, Inc.
Final 2009 Session Summary
June 3, 2009**

The 2009 session of the Georgia General Assembly ended on April 3rd at midnight. Legislators completed their most important and daunting task, passing an \$18 billion budget for Fiscal Year 2010 in a year of steeply declining state revenues. This session was extremely challenging, but HMHB played an important role in protecting programs and services for women and children and other objectives were also achieved. Governor Perdue had 40 days to sign or veto legislation and line items in the FY 2010 budget. He did not veto any bills or budget items of concern to HMHB. Legislation that did not pass this session will be eligible for passage during the 2010 session.

BUDGET UPDATE

The budget crisis facing Georgia and the nation is unprecedented and continues to unfold. A budget shortfall that was originally estimated at \$2 billion for FY 2010 grew to \$3.1 billion by March. State revenues have continued to fall, and on May 29, Gov. Sonny Perdue announced that due to the plummeting numbers, state agencies other than K-12 education will lose a quarter of their June funding. Perdue, in a letter to top state lawmakers, said he is being forced to lower the state revenue estimate by more than \$274 million for the 2009 fiscal year that ends June 30. That is a 1.45 percent drop in the 2009 budget state lawmakers approved earlier this year and this most recent cut comes on top of more than \$2 billion in spending reductions for fiscal 2009.

UPDATE ON HMHB LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

- **Increase funding for the Babies Born Healthy Program.** The budget crisis facing Georgia and the nation is unprecedented and continues to unfold. A budget shortfall that was originally estimated at \$2 billion for FY 2010 grew to \$3.1 billion by March. State agencies had been instructed in August 2008 to prepare budgets for the remainder of FY 2009 and FY 2010 with 6%, 8% and 10% cuts. These proposed cuts threatened a wide range of services and programs. Given these circumstances, HMHB began working last fall to protect critical services to women, children and families, and our work continued through the last day of the session. Funding for the Babies Born Healthy program was not increased, but it was not reduced. HMHB will continue to work to obtain additional funds for Babies Born Healthy, as this is the only government program that pays for prenatal care for low income pregnant women who do not qualify for Medicaid, and each year the program runs out of funds well before the end of the fiscal year.

- **Enhance Medicaid services for Georgia women by obtaining a federal family planning waiver.** \$250,000 in state funds was appropriated as seed money to the Department of Community Health to pursue a federal Medicaid waiver for family planning services. We have worked for several months to encourage the Department of Community Health to pursue a federal Medicaid waiver for planning services that will draw down federal funds for family planning services for low income adult women with a 90% federal/10% state matching rate. This waiver will allow women with incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level to receive Medicaid-paid family planning services. We will continue to work with DCH and Public Health staff on the waiver guidelines.
- **Oppose legislation that threatens health insurance benefits such as mammograms, pap smears and childhood immunizations.** There was no legislation introduced during the 2009 session that would directly threaten these health insurance benefits. The Senate did pass SR 334 (Sen. Judson Hill, R- Marietta), which creates The Senate Study Committee on Health Care Transformation, which will meet during the interim. This study committee will look at issues surrounding the availability and affordability of health care insurance and access to health care services. Similar study committees have been convened during the interim in recent years, and previous proposals have included allowing the sale of health insurance in Georgia without mandates such as mammograms, pap smears and other services that ensure prevention and early detection of disease. We will monitor the work of this study committee.
- **Monitor legislation and policy changes that impact services for Medicaid and PeachCare clients.** Prior to the session, a State Representative had legislation drafted that would have drastically reduced eligibility and benefits for PeachCare. We supported efforts to oppose this proposed legislation and in the end, the legislator did not introduce the bill. We also actively opposed **SB 92** (Sen. Judson Hill, R- Marietta) which would have converted Medicaid and PeachCare into a “premium assistance” program. The proposal would have disrupted the current system and created significant administrative costs for the state. SB 92 was passed by the Senate Insurance and Labor Committee, but did not reach the Senate floor for a vote. It is eligible for activity in 2010.
- **Protect funding for pediatric vaccines for underinsured children.** The Public Health Immunization program provides a variety of vaccines to underinsured children and youth. This program is underfunded, but state funds for the Rotavirus vaccine for underinsured infants appear to have been replaced with federal funds. Rotavirus is the leading cause of dehydrating diarrhea in infants and young children (which often requires hospitalization).
- **Support legislation to increase the state’s tobacco tax.** HMHB supported passage of **HB 39** (Rep. Ron Stephens, R- Savannah) which would have increased the tax on cigarettes by \$1 pre pack and generated approximately \$400

million per year in new revenue. The increased tax would deter teen smoking and save millions in public health costs caused by smoking. HB 39 did not pass, but is eligible for passage in 2010.

OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

FY 2010 Budget Highlights

- Eliminated proposed cuts in Medicaid (10%) and PeachCare (6%) rates paid to hospitals, doctors and other providers. Lower provider rates would have discouraged doctors, dentists, and others from accepting Medicaid and PeachCare clients, thereby making access to health care more difficult for low income families and their children.
- Restored \$2.5 million grant-in-aid to Public Health. Grant-in-aid is funding that the state distributes to local county health departments for staff and programs. Grant-in-aid funds have been aggressively cut since FY 2003.
- Restored \$6.1 million of a proposed \$10 million cut to Family Planning and Adolescent Health and Youth Development services.
- Provided \$992,000 for services to victims of child prostitution.
- Funds for school nurses were restored to \$29.1 million (3% cut).

Trauma Care Funding

For the second year in a row, legislators failed to come up with a comprehensive plan for funding a badly needed trauma care system. The one bill that did pass was Governor Perdue's proposal for increased fees for "super speeders." **HB 160** (Rep. Jim Cole, R-Forsyth) is expected to generate \$23 million per year, which is not sufficient funding for a trauma care system. **SB 156** (Sen. Cecil Staton, R-Macon) which proposed revamping the Georgia Trauma Care Network Commission, passed the Senate, but did not reach the House floor for a vote. **SR 277** (Sen. Greg Goggans, R-Douglas) proposed a Constitutional Amendment allowing voters to decide whether or not to impose a \$10 per year fee for licensed cars to fund a trauma care network. SR 277 also passed the Senate, but not the House.

Restructure of Department of Human Resources

HB 228 (Rep. Mark Butler, R-Carrollton) reorganizes and restructures the Departments of Human Resources and Community Health. Effective July 1 there will be a new Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities. Aging, DFCS and Child Support Enforcement will remain in the newly-named Department of Human Services, and the Division of Public Health will go to the Department of Community Health. The Public Health Director will be named by the Governor and will report to him and to the DCH Commissioner. An appointed commission will study whether Public Health should remain with the Department of Community Health or become free-standing or placed elsewhere. HB 228 also was amended to make permanent the

Commission on Family Violence, which was due to sunset at the end of this year. Gov. Perdue signed this bill.

OTHER LEGISLATION

HB 229 (Rep. Brooks Coleman, 97th) creates the SHAPE (Student Health and Physical Education) Act. Beginning in 2011-12, students in grades 1-12 enrolled in physical education must have an annual fitness assessment approved by the State Board of Education. *Status: Gov. Perdue signed this bill.*

HB 736 (Rep. Ron Stephens, 164th) would require public schools to provide parents or guardians of sixth grade female students information concerning the infection and the immunization against the human papillomavirus. *Status: Assigned to House Health & Human Services.*

SB 69 (Sen. Renee Unterman, 45th) expands the definition of child abuse to include sexual exploitation by any person who allows permits, encourages or requires a child to engage in prostitution or any sexually explicit product. The bill also expands the mandate for reporting child abuse beyond the responsibility of the parent or caretaker to include any person. *Status: Gov. Perdue signed this bill.*

SB 182 (Sen. Judson Hill, 32nd) would extend COBRA benefits from 3 to 9 months for unemployed workers from companies with less than 20 employees, using federal stimulus subsidies. Workers laid off from larger companies after September 1, 2008 are already eligible, but a change in Georgia law is required to allow workers from smaller companies to also be eligible. *Status: HB 182 did not pass, but the language was passed as a substitute to SB 94. Gov. Perdue signed SB 94.*

SB 223 (Sen. Renee Unterman, 45th) would create a Women's Reproductive Health Legislative Oversight Committee. The purpose would be to review and evaluate all women's reproductive health programs and services, including family planning, teen pregnancy prevention, and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases. The committee would consist entirely of legislators. *Status: Did not pass. Passed Senate. Did not pass House Judiciary.*

Prepared by Mary Frances Williams, HMHB Advocate.
Feedback, questions, or concerns can be directed to the HMHB Public Affairs Committee, c/o Merrilee Gober, Chair at magober@bellsouth.net