

Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition of Georgia, Inc.
Final 2007 Session Summary
June 4, 2007

The 2007 Session finally ended on April 20, 2007. This legislative session was unusual in a number of ways. For such a long session, very little legislation passed. There were also major disagreements over the Amended FY 2007 budget between the House, Senate, and Governor Perdue. When the Governor vetoed the Amended FY 2007 budget, the House overrode the veto, but the Senate did not follow suit. It was believed that a special session to re-work the 2007 budget would be required. However, Governor Perdue managed to avoid a special session by withdrawing his veto. He instead used a line-item veto to overturn a tax break included in the 2007 budget which, in his opinion, was too costly and cumbersome to enact.

HMHB spent much of the session doing defensive work, attempting to protect policy and budget gains made in the past on behalf of women and children. The biggest battles concerned the PeachCare program, as changes were proposed that threatened eligibility and benefits. In the end, the proposed changes were prevented, but a freeze on new enrollment put in place on March 11, remains in place.

Governor Perdue had 40 days, through May 30, to sign or veto bills. In all, he vetoed 41 bills and approximately \$140 million from the FY 2008 budget.

UPDATE ON HMHB LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

- Restore Medicaid eligibility for pregnant women and infants to 235% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Although this goal was not met, restoring eligibility from 200% of poverty to 235% of poverty, the level in effect prior to July 2004, remains a priority.
- Increase funding for the Babies Born Healthy Program. Increased funding for the Babies Born Healthy (BBH) Program was one of the casualties of the fighting between the House, Senate and Governor Perdue. The House version of the Amended FY 2007 budget included \$1 million in additional funds for BBH. Unfortunately, the Senate took the position that the amended budget should only be used to address the PeachCare shortfall, to fund the Department of Education midyear adjustment, and to fund a few other emergencies. The Senate version of the FY 2007 budget stripped out most additional funding, including the additional BBH money. It did not help matters that work on the Amended FY 2007 and the FY 2008 budgets were postponed until late in the session. The additional \$1 million for BBH was not included in the final version of the Amended FY 2007 budget, and no additional funding for the program was included in the FY 2008 budget either.
- HMHB is working closely with the Georgia Obstetrical and Gynecological Society and the March of Dimes to secure additional funding for Babies Born Healthy in the FY 2009 budget.
- Provide funding for the Cervical Cancer Prevention Vaccine. DHR requested, and Governor Perdue recommended, \$4.3 million in the FY 2008 budget for the new human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine. Neither the House nor the Senate provided for such funding in their versions of the budget, thus no funds were appropriated for the HPV vaccine in the FY 2008 budget.
- Oppose legislation that threatens health insurance benefits such as mammograms, pap smears, and childhood immunizations. A number of bills were introduced during the 2007 session that dealt with health insurance and there were proposals that would have done away with most of the mandated health insurance benefits. None of these bills got out of committee, but during the last two days of the session, such language was included in a conference committee report on a bill dealing with high deductible health insurance plans. HMHB and other advocacy organizations quickly mobilized and generated enough grassroots opposition from women throughout the state to defeat that proposed legislation.

- Monitor legislation that would impact services or funding for PeachCare, Medicaid or other important preventive healthcare programs for women and children. HB 340 (Speaker Glenn Richardson) as introduced would have lowered the income eligibility for PeachCare from 235% to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level and would have made dental and vision services optional at an additional premium. HB 340 passed the House and the Senate and a conference committee was appointed to work out differences between the House and Senate versions. In the end, no final action was taken on HB 340 in either chamber, and time ran out on the 40th day as the disagreement between the House and Governor Perdue over the Amended FY 2007 budget took center stage. HMHB worked long and hard with other advocacy groups to defeat HB 340 and other proposals that threatened the PeachCare program. This was a major victory.

OTHER ITEMS OF INTEREST

FY 2008 Budget Highlights

- PeachCare and Medicaid are adequately funded in the DCH budget.
- \$1 million for “new start” Community Health Centers in Bacon, Bibb, Gwinnett, Lanier, Murray and Richmond counties was included in the DCH budget.
- In an unusual move, Governor Perdue included language in his budget veto message concerning a handful of small line items in the FY 2008 budget that authorizes DHR to “utilize appropriate procurement procedures.” One such item was \$140,000 for the Juvenile Justice Fund of Atlanta for a regional assessment center for child victims of prostitution and trafficking. The Governor’s office has clarified that this was not intended as a veto, but gives DHR greater oversight of this budget item.

LEGISLATION

HB 429 (Rep. Sharon Cooper, 41st) requires HIV testing for pregnant women unless the woman refuses. Passed and signed by Governor.

SB 155 (Sen. Don Balfour, 9th) would require female students are to be vaccinated for human papilloma virus prior to entering grade 6, effective fall of 2008. Parents could opt out because of medical or religious reasons, as with other vaccinations. Passed Senate Health and Human Services Committee but was not voted on by Senate.

This update was prepared for HMHB by Mary Frances Williams. If you have questions, email her at mfwilliams@speakeasy.net.