



HEALTHY MOTHERS, HEALTHY BABIES
Coalition of Georgia

HMHB Legislative Update
3-5-07

Legislators again met Tuesday through Thursday of last week. On Friday, March 1 the House and Senate began a two week recess that will end when they reconvene on Monday March 19 for Day 28. The legislative schedule for the next several weeks was announced this week and it now appears that the Session will continue through mid to late April. Legislators will meet on Monday 3/19 and Tuesday 3/20 and then adjourn until Tuesday 3/27. They will then meet through Friday 3/30 and adjourn until after Easter, reconvening on Tuesday 4/10. They will meet through Thursday 4/12 and will adjourn until Tuesday 4/17, which will be the 37th legislative day. Although the final two days of the Session have not been set, House leadership has announced that the plan is to finish on the 39th Day, which could be as early as Thursday 4/19.

Legislators have picked up the pace as there are only 2 legislative days until the 30th day which is called Crossover Day, the last day to move legislative from one chamber to the other. Based on the adopted schedule, Crossover Day will be Tuesday, March 27.

Budget deliberations for the most part remain at a standstill due to concerns about the PeachCare shortfall. House Appropriations Subcommittees have scheduled work sessions this week to complete their recommendations for the Amended FY 2007 budget.

PEACHCARE UPDATE

The House Appropriations General Government Subcommittee chaired by Rep. Don Parsons (42nd) voted late last week to cut funds from Gov. Perdue's recreational fishing plan to help shore up PeachCare.

Several new bills that attempt to address the PeachCare shortfall have been introduced:

HB 620 and **HB 625** (Reps. Ron Stephens, 164th, Pat Gardner, 57th, and others), identical bills, address the PeachCare financing problem by using federal Medicaid funds. Supported by advocates, this approach guarantees the state the federal Medicaid match rate of 62% for the children, and if Congress enacts a retroactive fix, it can be reimbursed the full 73% SCHIP match. All PeachCare children would move into Medicaid at least temporarily and would receive all the same services they get now. The bills change the name of Medicaid to PeachCare A. Children with incomes below 150% of poverty (\$25,755 for 3) would remain in PeachCare A after Congress acts on SCHIP funding.

Children with higher incomes would move back into what is now PeachCare which would be called PeachCare B. Georgia will not lose any federal SCHIP funds by making this change. SCHIP match can be used for the children in Medicaid who have incomes above the limit that applied before the enactment of SCHIP. This move assures the state will always receive at least the Medicaid match rate for the eligible children in PeachCare A. It can then use all the SCHIP funds that are available and necessary for the children in PeachCare B, applying the remainder to the children in PeachCare A. The bills are in the House Insurance Committee.

SR 361 (Sen. Curt Thompson, 5th) would amend the Constitution to provide for a 1-cent sales tax dedicated to providing PeachCare for all children. It is in the Senate Finance Committee.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Help save PeachCare! Contact Governor Perdue (Phone 404-656-1776/Fax 404-657-7332), **House Speaker Glenn Richardson** (Phone 404-656-5020/Fax 404-656-5644) and **Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle** (Phone 404-656-5030/Fax 404-656-6739). **Tell them that you want them to fund the PeachCare shortfall without raising premiums, cutting children off the program or cutting benefits.**

Increase funding for the Babies Born Healthy Program. Babies Born Healthy is the only government program that pays for prenatal care for low income pregnant women who do not qualify for Medicaid. Due to the growing number of women in this category, the program has consistently run out of funds before the fiscal year ends. Current funding for FY 2007 is \$3.26 million which serves approximately 5000 women. The women who are eligible but not served due to lack of funds usually end up appearing at a hospital to deliver their baby having had no prenatal care. **It is estimated that an additional \$2 million in funding would allow the program to serve all eligible women. HMHB is working to have this funding added to the FY 2008 budget.**

Provide funding for the Cervical Cancer Prevention Vaccine. DHR requested \$4.3 million for the new human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine and Governor Perdue included the funding in his FY 2008 budget. This funding will allow vaccination of uninsured and underinsured girls. The \$4.3 million in the budget will purchase 42,327 doses. Three doses per individual are required. This funding is intended to provide the vaccine for adolescents who are not eligible for federally funded vaccines and who do not have private insurance. Senator Don Balfour (R-9th) introduced SB 155, which would require female students to be vaccinated for the human papillomavirus (HPV) prior to entering the 6th grade. HMHB believes that this vaccine should be available for any parent/adult who would like to have the vaccination. **UPDATE: SB 155 was amended in the Senate Health and Human Services Committee to include language stating that the requirement would be suspended if the federal government recalls the HPV vaccine or DHR determines there to be a shortage. Current law allowing parents to exempt their children from immunizations for religious reasons would apply. Was passed by Senate Health & Human Services Committee.**

Oppose legislation that threatens health insurance benefits such as mammograms, pap smears and childhood immunizations. Many of the current state mandates are for services that ensure prevention and early detection of disease. Bills have been introduced in recent years that would allow health insurance to be sold in Georgia without covering such services. HMHB will continue to oppose such legislation. **SB 28 (Sen. Judson Hill, R-Marietta) has splintered into an entire legislative package, including SB 150, SB 151 and SB 153.** **UPDATE: SB 153** the “Georgia Consumer Driven Health Insurance Plan” was heard twice this week. Tuesday it was amended to include a variety of health insurance mandates relating to cancer screening and treatment and passed out, but due to a technicality was recommitted. The exact same language was voted out as a Committee Substitute Thursday. **SB 151** creates the Georgia Health Security Underwriting Authority to replace the existing health benefits assignment system. It also received a Do Pass recommendation. Both bills are in Senate Rules.

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