



HEALTHY MOTHERS, HEALTHY BABIES
Coalition of Georgia

HMHB Legislative Update
4-2-07

Legislators were in session Tuesday through Friday of last week. As expected, Tuesday, the 30th day of the 2007 Session, known as “crossover day,” was long and tiring. House and Senate calendars were full and many bills were passed. The House and Senate have completed 33 of 40 possible legislative days and are in recess until Tuesday, April 10th.

PEACHCARE UPDATE

HB 340 (Speaker Glenn Richardson) passed the House on 3/27. Debate on the bill was heated but in the end the 101-63 vote was largely along party lines. Because HB 340 was the Speaker’s bill, many legislators stated that they felt they had no choice but to vote for the bill in spite of their concerns.

Advocates cite the following problems with HB 340:

- **HB 340 jeopardizes Georgia’s strides in ensuring our children have health care coverage.** PeachCare provides essential support to children from low-income working families who otherwise would be without access to private insurance. HB 340 proposes far-ranging and radical changes to Georgia’s very successful, cost-effective and efficient PeachCare program.
- **Children throughout Georgia rely on PeachCare. Every tenth Georgia child has PeachCare coverage.** In some areas, PeachCare covers one in six or even one in four children.
- **HB 340 would leave more children uninsured.** It would lower the income eligibility ceiling to 200% of the federal poverty level. Children in a family of three with income over \$34,320 would not be able to get PeachCare, down from the current \$40,350. With that ceiling, 3,000 to 5,000 children each year will be denied coverage. Georgia children are already more likely than children in most other state to be uninsured.
- **Cutting PeachCare eligibility would save very little in state dollars and would shift higher costs to all of us.** The “savings” in state funds for cutting eligibility would be minimal- between \$1.2 and 2.4 million per year, but cutting PeachCare would shift higher costs elsewhere. Children will go to emergency rooms for care, and some local governments will pick up the tab. Every Georgia family with private insurance already pays about \$750 per year extra to cover uninsured people. When parents have to stay out of work with sick children (more likely with children are uninsured) employers pay costs.

- **HB 340 would cut PeachCare service coverage for currently enrolled children. It would make dental and vision services optional at an additional premium.** Vision and dental benefits are standard in SCHIP plans in 49 of 50 states.

HB 340 has been assigned to Senate Rules.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

The Lt. Governor and the Senate can still save PeachCare, and indications are they may show more concern for children and working families. See HB 340 talking points above:

- Ask your own Senator to stand up for children and hard-working, tax-paying families by voting against HB 340 if it comes up.

Click here for Senate contact information:

http://www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2007_08/senate/senatelist.php

- Ask Lt. Governor Casey Cagle to stop HB 340. Let him know Georgia's children and hard-working, tax-paying families are counting on him to stand up for them.

TEL: (404) 656-5030

FAX: (404) 656-6739

Email:

http://ltgov.georgia.gov/00/article/0,2086,2199618_2208307_11792200,00.html

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. **The amended FY 2007 budget passed the House with \$1 million in additional funds for Babies Born Healthy. UPDATE: On Wednesday, March 28, the Senate Appropriations Committee voted on their version of the FY 2007 budget. The Senate has taken the position that the amended or supplemental budget should be used only for emergencies, critical needs and to meet the General Assembly's basic constitutional obligations. As passed, The Senate version of the Amended FY 2007 budget contains mid-year funding for schools, PeachCare and assistance for south Georgia communities damaged by recent tornadoes. The Babies Born Healthy money was not included in the Senate version**

of the FY 2007 budget. As funding for BBH has been exhausted for this fiscal year, we will work to convince the Senate that the funds recommended by the House fit the Senate criteria for inclusion in the supplemental 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. HMHB believes that this vaccine should be available for any parent/adult who would like to have the vaccination. 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. Some advocates have questioned mandating the HPV vaccine, especially because the vaccine is relatively new. **UPDATE: SB 155 did not pass the Senate by crossover day so is most likely dead for this year.**

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. SB 153** the “Georgia Consumer Driven Health Insurance Plan” has been amended to include a variety of health insurance mandates relating to cancer screening and treatment and was voted out as a committee substitute. **UPDATE: SB 153 passed the Senate and has been assigned to House Insurance. There are major problems with SB 153, including the fact that many current health insurance mandates, such as post-childbirth hospital stays, newborn coverage and well-child visits and immunizations are not included. We are being told that SB 153 will not be voted out of House Insurance but will continue to closely monitor the bill.**

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