

HMHB Legislative Update 1-18-07

The 2007 Session opened on Monday, January 8. The Georgia General Assembly has biennial sessions, which means that legislation that is introduced but does not pass during the first year is eligible for action during the second year. The 2007 session will be the first year in this cycle.

Lt. Governor Casey Cagle will govern the Senate. House Speaker Glenn Richardson was re-elected to lead the House of Representatives. The House and Senate convened briefly every day last week and have taken this week off for joint House-Senate budget hearings. Governor Sonny Perdue presented his budget recommendations for the Amended FY 2007 and FY 2008 budgets last week.

Update on HMHB Legislative Items

Restore Medicaid eligibility for pregnant women and infants to 235% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In the FY 2005 budget, the Medicaid eligibility was reduced from 235% to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. More women had access to early prenatal care and the results were impressive and measurable. In 2004 Georgia had the lowest percentage of preterm births among southern states and ranked 10th highest in the nation on the percentage of babies born to women who had early prenatal care. There has been no move to restore eligibility to 235% and **the funds were not requested by the Department of Community Health (DCH) or included in Governor Perdue's recommendations for FY 2008.**

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. The funds were not requested by the Department of Human Resources (DHR) or included in Governor Perdue's 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.**

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.

Monitor legislation, departmental policies and state budget proposals that would impact services or threaten adequate funding for PeachCare, Medicaid or other important preventive healthcare programs for women and children. Congress has not reauthorized funding for SCHIP (Federal State Children's Health Insurance Program) resulting in a federal funds shortfall for Georgia of \$131 million. Funding is expected to run out prior to the end of the current fiscal year. Both the Georgia House and Senate passed resolutions this week to protect funding for PeachCare (**HR 16** and **SR 6**). Additionally, state legislators have joined Governor Perdue and DCH Commissioner Dr. Rhonda Medows in urging federal officials to take immediate action.

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

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