

HMHB Legislative Update 2-12-07

Saturday was Family Day at the Capitol as legislators completed day 17. The General Assembly will meet through Thursday of this week and then take Friday and Monday off, reconvening for Day 22 on Tuesday, February 20.

Deliberations over how to handle the \$131 million shortfall in the PeachCare program have taken a turn for the worse. Although Congress has made it clear that the needed funding will be available to states, albeit a bit late for Georgia as the program will run out of funds in mid-March, House and Senate leaders seem to be using this opportunity to dismantle the popular and successful PeachCare program.

PEACHCARE UPDATE- Urgent!

The Department of Community Affairs announced last week that PeachCare enrollment will be frozen on March 11. Also, children whose premiums are not paid on time will lose coverage. Governor Perdue has taken this step because there has been no break in the standoff between the state and Congress over the federal funding shortfall. Unfortunately, Governor Perdue and legislative leaders have not taken any action to bridge the temporary gap with available state funds and federal Medicaid funds.

To make matters worse, some elected officials now propose to slash PeachCare eligibility and services. Lt Governor Casey Cagle appointed a Senate task force to discuss solutions to the PeachCare shortfall. Members of the task force are Senate Majority Leader Tommie Williams (R-19), Senate Majority Whip Mitch Seabaugh (R-28), Sen. Greg Goggans (R-7) and Sen. Horacena Tate (D-38). The task force met privately Friday and reportedly discussed cutting PeachCare eligibility levels, eliminating dental and vision coverage and reducing prescription drug coverage. House Speaker Glenn Richardson has introduced HB 340, which would cut off children with family incomes between 200% and 235% of the federal poverty level.

These drastic actions are unnecessary as state leaders have viable options for temporarily funding this popular and successful program while awaiting federal action. The Legislature could approve a one-time \$60 to \$80 million appropriation in the supplemental FY 2007 budget and another \$50 to \$70 million in the FY 2008 budget. Or, the state could cover the anticipated loss by switching many of the PeachCare enrollees to Medicaid and leveraging federal dollars.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Help save PeachCare! Contact Governor Perdue (Phone 404-656-1776/Fax 404-757-7332), 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. UPDATE: The House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees that deal with the DHR budget are holding hearings and HMHB will provide testimony requesting the additional funds.**

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Contact members of the House Appropriations Human Resources Subcommittee and encourage them to include additional funds for Babies Born Healthy in the FY 2008 budget. The program currently funded at \$3 million, runs out of funds 6 or 7 months into the fiscal year. Some health districts were out of funds by December 31.

Rep. Mark Butler, Chair (Dist. 18, Carrollton) 404-463-2245 Capitol office	Rep. Len Walker (Dist. 107, Loganville) 404-656-5139 Capitol
Rep. Jeff May, Secretary (Dist. 111, Monroe) 404-656-5105 Capitol	Rep. Stan Watson (Dist. 91, Decatur) 404-656-0220 Capitol
Rep. Buddy Carter (Dist. 159, Pooler) 404-656-0213 Capitol	Rep. Larry O’Neal (Dist. 146, Warner Robins) 404-656-5103 Capitol
Rep. Keith Heard (Dist. 114, Athens) 404-656-0220 Capitol	Rep. Chuck Sims (Dist. 169, Douglas) 404-656-0287 Capitol
Rep. Jerry Keen (Dist. 179, St. Simons Island) 404-656-5052 Capitol	Rep. Richard Royal (Dist. 171, Camilla) 404-656-0265 Capitol
Rep. Judy Manning (Dist. 32, Marietta) 404-656-7857 Capitol	Rep. Penny Houston (Dist. 170, Nashville) 404-656-0202 Capitol
Rep. Bobby Reese (Dist. 98, Sugar Hill) 404-656-0254 Capitol	

You can also contact members of the Senate Appropriations Human Development Subcommittee regarding funding for Babies Born Healthy.

Sen. Renee Unterman, Chair (Dist. 45, Buford) 404-463-1368 Capitol	Sen. Eric Johnson (Dist. 1, Savannah) 404-656-5109
Sen. Don Thomas, Vice Chair (Dist. 54, Dalton) 404-656-6436	Sen. Nancy Schaefer (Dist. 50, Turnerville) 404-463-1367
Sen. Greg Goggans (Dist. 7, Douglas) 404-463-5263	Sen. Valencia Seay (Dist. 34) 404-656-5095
Sen. Johnny Grant (Dist. 25, Milledgeville) 404-656-0082	Sen. Cecil Staton (Dist. 18, Macon) 404-656-5039

Sen. Steve Henson (Dist. 41, Tucker)
404-656-0085

Sen. Horacena Tate (Dist. 38, Atlanta)
404-463-8053

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. UPDATE: The \$4.3 million in the budget will purchase 42,327 doses. Three doses per individual are required. County health departments will receive some doses, but the majority will go to non-public health providers since only 20% of child/adolescent vaccines are given in public health departments. 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.**

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. **UPDATE: SB 28 (Sen. Judson Hill, R-Marietta) is a comprehensive bill that does some good things, but threatens mandates and the current risk assignment pool.** Insurers from other states who are not governed by Georgia laws that require coverage of mammograms, pap smears, etc., would be allowed to offer health insurance policies in Georgia. There is also language concerning the high risk assignment pool that would make it difficult for people who have exhausted their COBRA coverage to be eligible for the assignment pool, as they currently are in Georgia. In order to be eligible for the assignment pool, a person would have to be rejected by 2 insurers (regardless of cost of the policy) and pre-existing conditions would not be covered for 12 months. Organization and oversight of the risk assignment pool would shift from the Insurance Commissioner to a 7 member board of political appointees, 6 of whom must be affiliated with the insurance industry. **SB 28 is currently in the Senate Insurance and Labor Committee, which is holding hearings on the bill.**

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

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