

HMHB Legislative Update

3-19-07

Legislators have been in recess for the past 2 weeks, but House and Senate committees have been meeting and working on bills. There are now 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.

PEACHCARE UPDATE

On March 13th, Governor Perdue announced that he intended to use state funds in the Medicaid budget to fill the PeachCare funding gap while Georgia waits for Congress to act on SCHIP reauthorization. This was very good news. The freeze on PeachCare enrollment went into effect on March 11 and remains in place in spite of the decision to use state funds to fill the funding gap. Some 3,000 children a month will not get PeachCare and any child with a late premium payment will lose PeachCare while the freeze is in place.

Pending legislation threatens to reduce the eligibility level and benefits available to the children of low-income families. **HB 340**, sponsored by Speaker Glenn Richardson, proposes revising the income eligibility to downward from 235% to 200% of the federal poverty level. HB 340 will be heard in House Health and Human Services on Monday 3/19.

HB 620 and **HB 625** (Reps. Ron Stephens, Pat Gardner and others) would allow Georgia to use Medicaid funds to protect PeachCare coverage for children and would not cut eligibility or services. Both bills are assigned to House Insurance.

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). **Leaders continue to make statements about how cuts to the PeachCare program are necessary to save it. This is not true and your calls are needed now more than ever! 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. **UPDATE: The House Appropriations DHR Subcommittee has recommended \$1 million in additional funding for Babies**

Born Healthy in the Amended FY 2007 budget. The full Appropriations Committee will finalize the House version of the Amended FY 2007 budget on Monday 3/19.

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 so as the vaccine is relatively new. 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.** **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. **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.

Other Legislation

Two bills on newborn screening were considered this week. **SB 289 (Sen. Don Balfour, R-Snellville)** would have allowed private labs to perform newborn screening as an alternative to the state operated newborn screening lab. A report from the State Auditor evaluated four states that have moved to privatization of newborn screening and raised serious concerns about such a move in Georgia. Senate Health and Human Services failed to pass SB 289 this week. A similar bill (**HB 352 by Representative Donna Sheldon, R-Dacula**) failed to pass the House Health and Human Services Committee.

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

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