

CAPITOL CONNECTION

Florida Children's Services Council

News from our State and Nation's Capitols about children and families



Week Two

March 12, 2010

Another Tight Budget Year, More Tough Cuts

Senate President Jeff Atwater released the Senate's initial budget allocations on Wednesday a week after the House, setting the stage for budget negotiations between both sides. Generally, the House and Senate budgets line up similarly with roughly \$10 billion for Pre-K through 12, more than \$7 billion in Health Care, and \$3.5 billion for Civil & Criminal Justice.

The forecast from state economists Tuesday confirmed that legislators still face a \$3-billion budget shortfall, which means more tough cuts. Taking that into account, lawmakers have begun the difficult task of divvying up scarce dollars among programs. In the Senate, School Readiness fared well. However, VPK and Healthy Families were not as fortunate. In the House, School Readiness would see a major cut, but VPK would be nearly fully funded. Information released by the Office of Early Learning reveals how the budgets line up.

School Readiness

	State General Revenue	Federal Impact	Total	Children Impacted
House Reduction	\$15,838,744	\$19,342,829	\$35,181,573	8,795
Senate Reduction	\$3,112,087	*\$3,865,687	\$6,977,774	1,744

*Note: The Senate did not reduce the Federal budget authority, but the reduction of state GR would likely result in an inability to draw down the \$3.8 in federal matching funds for a total effective reduction of \$6.9.

VPK

TAKE NOTE

FCSC Capitol Hill Days

March 16-17
Tallahassee

Rally for Afterschool

April 20, 2010
Washington, DC

One Goal Summer Conference

July 21-23
Tampa

ZERO TO THREE Offers Guide to Improving Policies for Infants and Toddlers

ZERO TO THREE combines evidence from science, research and practice in a new guide, "Early Experiences Matter: A Guide to Improved Policies for Infants and Toddlers," that is designed for use by policymakers and advocates. The Policy Guide includes: Twelve concise issue briefs that support ZERO TO THREE's policy agenda, infant-toddler data to inform the policymaking process, a compilation of

<u>House PreK-12 Appropriations</u>	<u>Senate PreK-12 Appropriations</u>
<u>Recommendations</u>	<u>Recommendations</u>
Total VPK Budget: \$402,321,505	Total VPK Budget: \$350,509,999
Base Student Allocation: School Year \$2,549 and Summer \$2,168	Base Student Allocation: School Year and Summer \$2,200

Other Senate allocations released this week included:

- KidCare - Overall increase of \$37 million to cover enrollment growth, no price level increase for HK resulting in \$10 million reduction, and \$2.2 million added back for increased dental benefit
- Healthy Start -- Funded at current levels
- Healthy Families - Funding eliminated (\$27 million)
- Early Steps -- Funded at current levels
- Children's Medical Services -- Funded at current levels
- Community Based Care - Funded at current levels
- Child Protection Investigation -- Funded at current levels
- Independent Living -- Funded at current levels
- Adoption Maintenance Subsidy -- \$7 million cut (budget cut in half)

Additionally, Florida may be in line to receive another \$1 billion in Medicaid money from Congress, which has lawmakers jockeying to get a share of those funds. Senate Health and Human Services budget chair Durell Peaden was joined by two Democrats on his committee -- Sens. Nan Rich and Eleanor Sobel -- in a letter to Senate President Jeff Atwater insisting that the funds go to offset deep cuts in health and social programs.

Senate Proposes Eliminating Healthy Families Budget

The Senate Health and Human Services Appropriations Committee this week proposed eliminating all funding for Healthy Families, Florida's only statewide child abuse prevention program proven to prevent child abuse and neglect before it ever begins. Research shows economic hardship increases the strain on families, often leading to spikes in child abuse and neglect rates. Former Sen. Daniel Webster, who helped launch Healthy Families 12 years ago while serving as Speaker of the House, stated recently in an [Orlando Sentinel](#) op-ed that he still believes Healthy Families is "A wise investment in kids." For more information on Healthy Families Florida, [click here](#).

CALL TO ACTION: Call and email the Senators on the [Health and Human Services Committee](#) before next Friday when they are expected to make their final recommendations:

- Acknowledge the difficult decisions that must be made to balance the budget
- Thank them for their past support of Healthy Families

the evidence for investing in the infant-toddler policy agenda, a strategic look at ways to get started, and issue papers and policymaking tools. [Download The Early Experiences Matter Policy Guide.](#)

OEL Announces Improved Technical Assistance Resource

The Office of Early Learning (OEL) has redesigned its Technical Assistance Quarterly, "Connections," to be more relevant, timely and easily accessible. The new format features easy to navigate pages so information is just a click away. Updates to the live pages will be made frequently. To view Connections, access the new quick link on the OEL homepage, www.flready.com. Look for the red link at the top of the Quick Links bar on the left hand side.

Federal Funding Available for Communities

A federal funding opportunity is being offered to strengthen, through granting organizations, the capacity of community-based organizations to serve low-income communities through innovative and replicable programming. The Corporation for National and Community Service is accepting applications for the Social Innovation Fund. Applications are

- Ask that funding for Healthy Families Florida be maintained at the current level

IN OTHER STATE NEWS

First-Ever Florida Prosperity Caucus Convenes in Tallahassee

More than 40 participants joined Rep. Alan Williams (D-Leon) for the first-ever Prosperity Caucus of the Florida Legislature. Rep. Williams developed the caucus in conjunction with the Florida Prosperity Partnership to promote policy initiatives that position working families to take the next steps toward a positive financial future. The Washington, DC-based Corporation for Enterprise Development reported that according to their Assets & Opportunity Scorecard, Florida rates as a "C" in terms of wealth, poverty and the financial security of families. Participating legislators included Rep. Oscar Braynon, II, (Miami-Dade), Rep. Richard Steinberg (D-Miami-Dade), Rep. Mark Pafford (D-Palm Beach) and Rep. Ron Saunders (D-Monroe).

Florida Back to Work Program Receives Federal Funding

Gov. Charlie Crist announced this week that the Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI), in partnership with the Florida Department of Children and Families, Workforce Florida Inc., and the Regional Workforce Boards, will receive its first installment of \$61.2 million of funds from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service in the \$200-million Florida Back to Work initiative. Distributions of the remaining funds will follow. Florida Back to Work uses federal dollars to pay for up to 95 percent of a new hire's salary. New employees must meet federal low-income guidelines and have a dependent child in the home to be eligible for the positions.

To date, AWI received more than 1,100 applications from employers and businesses throughout the state. These proposals include a wide range of businesses, including local government and non-profit organizations, restaurants, manufacturing companies and child care centers. AWI estimates Florida Back to Work will create as many as 10,000 direct jobs and 15,000 indirect jobs through additional economic activity. Although federal funding for the program ends in September, the goal of Florida Back to Work is that participating businesses will retain the new employees. To learn more about the workforce services and resources available in Florida, visit EmployFlorida.com.

Report Says Medicaid Savings Could Prove Elusive, Committee Calls for Reform Expansion

A report from Pacific Health Policy Group on Monday said that efforts to reduce Florida's skyrocketing Medicaid costs by pushing more patients into managed care are not likely to yield major savings soon. In its report to a House council, the group laid out several approaches for lawmakers to consider to rein in costs. But for a Medicaid program facing a \$1.8 billion deficit, the savings possibilities are likely modest in the short-term, Pacific's Andrew Cohen told the Select Policy Council on Strategic and Economic Planning. "Roughly half of the state's 2.7 million

due by April 8, 2010. The Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, Volunteer Florida, invites nonprofit foundations throughout Florida to partner in seeking up to \$5 million in funding from the new Social Innovation Fund. More information about this funding opportunity is available at:

www.nationalservice.org

500-Mile Walk Raises Awareness of Sexual Abuse Survivors

Lauren's Kids, a foundation focused on preventing sexual abuse, has organized a 500-mile walk that starts April 2 in Aventura and will end at the state Capitol in Tallahassee on April 21. Anyone interested is encouraged to join Lauren Book-Lim, abuse survivor and founder of Lauren's Kids, during her walk across Florida. Upon her arrival at the Capitol, Lauren's foundation will host a rally to encourage and support passage of all pending legislation to protect children from sexual assault. [Learn more.](#)

Capitol Connection is also available online at the FCSC [web site](#).

Medicaid recipients are already in some kind of managed care program. But phasing-out the state's MediPass program could yield \$60 million in first-year savings by having patients use just one managed-care plan, instead of the two now used. Other steps, including paying a state-set 'capitation' rate to HMOs participating in Medicaid could yield savings of as much as 3 percent, while long-term care savings could range as high as 5 percent of that program's costs," Cohen and partner Scott Wittman told the council.

On Thursday, the Senate Health and Human Services Appropriations Committee released a proposal to expand Medicaid reform by requiring Medicaid recipients in 19 counties, including Miami-Dade to enroll in managed-care plans during the next year, with additional counties to be added over the following 18 months.

Senate Committee Finds Compromise, Advances Sex Offender Bill

Lawmakers in the Criminal Justice Committee voted 7-0 Tuesday to advance a bill ([SB 1284](#)) that would ban sex offenders from loitering in areas frequented by children. It would also set a minimum statewide buffer zone on how close offenders can live to schools and daycare centers. Committee members agreed on a provision that prohibits sex offenders from loitering within 300 feet of places frequented by children such as a school bus stop, a day care or a play ground. However, restrictions on how close a sex offender could live to a school or daycare center was cause for debate. Lawmakers initially set out to create a uniform, statewide standard of 1,000 feet, but counties wanted their tougher restrictions to stay in place. The compromise set a minimum 1,000 foot standard for the state, but still allows counties to enact tougher residency restrictions, up to 2,500 feet. The House companion, [HB 119](#), passed the Public Safety & Domestic Security Policy Committee, and is slated to go next to the Military & Local Affairs Policy Committee.

Committee Approves Changes to Open Records Law

The Senate Community Affairs approved legislation ([SB 1598](#)) this week that would require government officials to undergo training on the state's Sunshine Law and lower costs associated with public records requests. The changes come as a result of a report issued by the Governor's Commission on Open Government. They would require officials to get open government training, prohibit agencies from charging for the cost of duplication if it takes less than 30 minutes to make the records available, and create a misdemeanor offense for any public official who willingly violates the Sunshine Law.

FEDERAL NEWS

Education Hearings Begin

Last week, Education Secretary Arne Duncan testified before the House Education and Labor Committee about the Obama Administration's education agenda, the budget proposal for FY2011, and plans for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (known as No Child Left Behind during its last reauthorization). During his

remarks, Secretary Duncan highlighted the Administration's "cradle-to-career" strategy for improving education, including the proposed Early Learning Challenge Fund, the Promise Neighborhoods initiative, and tax credits and student loan provisions to expand access to higher education opportunities.

(Source: Zero to Three, *The Baby Monitor*)

EARLY LEARNING

ELC Bills Get Committee References

[HB 1571](#) by Rep. Greg Evers (R-Santa Rosa) and [SB 2710](#) by Sen. Mike Bennett (R-Manatee) were filed in both the House and Senate. The bills address administrative issues affecting the early learning coalitions including procurement requirements for VPK, exemption of ELCs from Florida's Administrative Procedures Act, and revising the minimum number of children to be served by an ELC. This week, the Senate bill was referred to four committees: Commerce; Education Pre-K - 12; Governmental Oversight and Accountability; and Education Pre-K - 12 Appropriations. The House bill was referred to PreK-12 Policy; Governmental Affairs Policy; Full Appropriations Council on Education & Economic Development; and Education Policy Council.

CHILD WELFARE

Transition Services for Youth

[HB 627](#) by Rep. Ari Porth (D-Broward) and [SB 1356](#) by Sen. Stephen Wise (R-Duval), permits the Department of Juvenile Justice to provide transition to adulthood services to youth in DJJ's custody or supervision. Both bills moved forward during the second week of session. HB 627 was unanimously approved by the Public Safety & Domestic Security Committee and now heads to the Full Appropriations Council on Education & Economic Development. SB 1356 was unanimously approved by the Children, Families and Elder Affairs Committee and goes next to the Criminal Justice Committee. The bill, which has no fiscal impact, requires that transition to adulthood services for a child must be part of an overall plan leading to the total independence of the child from DJJ's supervision.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

Bill Would Eliminate Life Sentences for Juveniles

The Senate Criminal Justice Committee approved a bill ([SB 184](#)) Tuesday that would establish parole for adolescent offenders, making it likely that life sentences for juveniles would be eliminated. The measure would establish parole for kids who committed a crime when they were 15 years old or younger and were sentenced to more than 10 years in prison. The panel approved the bill 6-1, with Sen. Victor Crist voting against it. The measure is next slated for the Senate Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations Committee. The House companion ([HB 23](#)) was passed by the Public Safety & Domestic Security Policy Committee, and is now before the House Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations

Committee.

OTHER ISSUES

Booster Seat Bill

[SB 316](#) by Sen. Thad Altman (R-Brevard) passed unanimously through the Senate Criminal Justice Committee with an amendment that adds the child's height to the age requirement. The bill would require booster seats, in addition to seat belts, for children aged 4 through 7 and less than 4'9" to protect the child by properly using a crash tested, federally approved child restraint device. It also provides certain exceptions, and redefines the term "motor vehicle" to exclude certain vehicles from such requirements.

CALL TO ACTION: Please call Rep. Dean Cannon to urge him to allow the bill to move forward in the House.

This issue of Capitol Connection is brought to you by The Firm, composed of CSC legislative liaisons around the state, and Editor Kriss Vallese. Please contact Firm Chair Diana Ragbeer, Director of Public Policy & Communications with The Children's Trust, at diana@thechildrenstrust.org, Amy Petril, Director of Public Policy & Advocacy at the Children's Board of Hillsborough County, at apetrila@childrensboard.org, or Vivian Alarcon, CEO, Florida Children's Services Council, at valarcon@floridacsc.org with questions regarding legislative issues in this newsletter.