

CAPITOL CONNECTION

Florida Children's Services Council

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



Week Three

March 19, 2010

Bill Jeopardizes Long-Term Community Investments in Children

Faced with a bill ([SB 1216](#)) that would jeopardize the future of Children's Services Councils, the Florida CSC board of directors gathered in Tallahassee this week for their annual Capitol Hill Days. Board members were updated on conversations with bill sponsor Sen. Joe Negron (R-Martin) that attempted to address his concerns about accountability, transparency, and citizen engagement. The board then spent hours deliberating options for a compromise that would make the bill more reasonable. Unfortunately, a compromise could not be reached that would preserve the integrity of CSC governance and keep local children's councils above the political and partisan fray.

As a result, Sen. Negron introduced an [amendment](#) that would force five of Florida's eight CSCs to be placed on a local ballot this August for voters to determine their fate - less than six months away. In the amended bill, which passed the Children, Family & Elderly Affairs Committee, the five CSCs that would go to ballot in August are JWB-CSC of Pinellas County, CSC of Martin County, Children's Board of Hillsborough County, CSC of St. Lucie, and CSC of Okeechobee County. The amended bill also would require the remaining three CSCs to go to ballot in 2012 (CSC of Palm Beach and CSC of Broward) and in 2018 (The Children's Trust).

Sadly, CSCs will have their hands tied in making their case to their communities because they (and other local governments) were prohibited by the Legislature last year from campaigning on any ballot measure (see SB216/ 2009). For CSCs on an August ballot, citizens leading private efforts to educate voters will not be able to lay the groundwork and raise the resources in time. **Voters will be cheated out of the opportunity to make an informed decision about investments in their community's children.**

The amended bill passed Thursday on a 6-2 vote with yes votes from Sens. Storms (chair), Hill, Diaz de la Portilla, Garcia, Wise, and Detert. Sens. Rich and Justice voted no. The next stop for SB 1216 is the Community Affairs Committee. In the House, a similar bill ([HB 1227](#)) by Rep. Debbie Mavfield (R-Indian River) is expected to be heard in the

TAKE NOTE

[Children's Week](#)

April 11-14

Tallahassee

Rally for Afterschool

April 20

Washington, DC

[One Goal Summer Conference](#)

July 21-23

Tampa

St. Lucie CSC Launches "Do You Know" Campaign

The St. Lucie CSC has launched a new campaign designed to generate greater awareness of the many ways it serves children in the community. As part of the campaign, a video titled, "Do You Know? Now You Know," was created and placed on You Tube. The video taps into audiences that may recognize a program, such as the Boys & Girls Club, but not know that the St. Lucie CSC provides funds for the program. The video helps

Committee on Military and Community Affairs.

Special thanks go to community leaders who testified in opposition to the bill during yesterday's committee meeting: David Kennedy (former Board Chair, Children's Board of Hillsborough County), Lynn Frank (Board Member, Boys & Girls Club in Martin County), Maureen Dinnen (Member, Broward County School Board), Ted Granger (President, United Way of Florida), Karen Woodall (Coordinator, Coalition for Fair and Comprehensive Tax Reform), and Bobbie Sewell (State Government Relations, Broward County).

CALL TO ACTION: SB 1216 now goes to the Senate [Community Affairs Committee](#). Contact members of the committee to tell them to vote NO on this bad bill. Please also contact members of the House [Military & Local Affairs Committee](#) immediately to voice your opposition to this bill.

At a time when funding for children's programs is being cut to levels that will endanger thousands of children, the possibility of losing locally invested dollars will make the crisis even worse.

This unnecessary proposal impinges on local communities and could not come at a worse time for state-funded programs that rely on CSC support. [Download additional talk points.](#)

Florida CSC Board Convenes for Capitol Hill Days in Tallahassee

In addition to their work on SB 1216, the Florida CSC Board of Directors heard from Dr. Brittany Birken, Director of the AWI Office of Early Learning (OEL), who provided a report on major initiatives underway led by OEL, including development of the Early Learning Information System and the Professional Development initiative. Dr. Birken also updated Florida CSC members on the up-to-the minute status of legislative budget proposals for VPK and School Readiness which are, along with most state programs, very vulnerable to catastrophic reductions.

Department of Children and Families Secretary George Sheldon also participated in the meeting to brief the board on recent department accomplishments and ongoing challenges. He too reviewed the grave outlook for funding in the midst of Florida's budget crisis. Both leaders expressed gratitude for the important part CSCs play in assisting their state programs, and lauded the strengthening of the working partnership between CSCs and state agencies in recent years.

OTHER STATE NEWS

Budget is Primary Focus in Week Three

Standing on the brink of a \$3-billion budget hole, lawmakers focused on little else this week except cutting costs. Entire state agencies were even offered up for restructuring or dismantling in an effort to reduce

viewers connect the CSC to the programs it funds. A special page was also created on the CSC web site to direct viewers to the site where additional videos and information about the other CSC funded programs will be posted. [View the video.](#)

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 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

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

expenses. Not surprisingly, very few bills of interest saw movement. In the House, budget committees released more details on allocations for specific programs. Among those hardest hit were VPK and Healthy Start. VPK was reduced approximately \$54 million from just a week ago. Budget negotiations are expected to begin much earlier than usual according to leadership. As of this week, here's where the House stands on other issues of interest.

- KidCare - Overall increase of \$37 million to cover enrollment growth, capitation rate freeze for HK resulting in \$10 million savings, and funds dental benefit at \$12 per member
- Healthy Start -- \$4 million cut (eliminates Healthy Start Coalitions)
- Healthy Families - Funded at current level
- Children's Medical Services -- \$3.4 million cut
- Community Based Care - Funded at current levels for programs (some admin cuts)
- Child Protection Investigation - Funded at current levels
- Independent Living - Reduces stipend from \$875 per child to \$675
- Adoption Maintenance Subsidy -- \$12.8 million (replaces non-recurring)

CALLS TO ACTION: A full court press is needed on calls to Representatives on the House Full Appropriations Council and the Senate Ways and Means Committee regarding VPK funding. Ask legislators not to reduce the "per student" funding amount (Base Student Allocation). See [AWI fact sheet](#).

The House Health Care Appropriations Committee proposal would eliminate Healthy Start Coalitions and shift service dollars and responsibilities to the local County Health Departments. The state will save \$4 million, but it will lose \$32 million annually in additional funds leveraged by Healthy Start Coalitions. Call your Representative and urge them not to make these cuts. [See FAHSC alert](#).

Lawmakers Attempt to Gain Control of Medicaid Costs

With Medicaid spending accounting for about half of the state shortfall, the Health and Human Services (HHS) budget committee advanced a plan to move 247,671 Medicaid recipients across 19 counties into HMOs, a shift expected to save the state \$28.6 million next year - but close to \$100 million annually in future years. Still, with 2.7 million Floridians crowded onto Medicaid rolls now absorbing about one-quarter of all state spending, HHS budget chairman Sen. Durell Peaden conceded that gains from the dramatic effort were less than hoped for once they were reviewed by state analysts. The 19 counties targeted for the HMO move are those that have two or more managed care Medicaid plans already operating and are considered to have the capacity to serve a larger population. Among them are most Central Florida counties, including Orange, Seminole and Osceola, along with

Miami-Dade, Hillsborough, Palm Beach and Pinellas counties. Already, about 1 million Florida Medicaid patients are treated through managed care.

EARLY LEARNING

ELC Bills Get Committee References

The Early Learning bill, [SB 2014](#) by Sen. Stephen Wise (R-Duval), which addresses various administrative and governance issues, cleared its first hurdle having been heard, amended and passed unanimously by the Senate Commerce Committee. Now a Committee Substitute, the bill travels on to the Education PreK-12 Committee with 4 amendments including one that directs the Agency for Workforce Innovation to adopt procedures for merging early learning coalitions and for early termination of the terms of coalition members. A similar bill, HB 1203 by Rep Nelson, passed the Pre-K-12 Committee on March 17 with an amendment to address exemptions for the kindergarten readiness rate for children with disabilities.

[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 establishment of standardized procurement and exemption from the Administrative Procedures Act. No action this week.

STATE & LOCAL REVENUES

Property / Annual Assessment / Exemption

[SJR 1254](#) by Mike Fasano (R-Pasco) passed Senate Community Affairs on Wednesday this week on an 11-0 vote. The resolution proposes amendments to the State Constitution to reduce from 10 percent to 5 percent the limitation on annual assessment increases applicable to non-homestead real property, provide an additional homestead exemption for new owners of homestead property and application and limitations with respect thereto. Referred to Community Affairs, Finance & Tax, Education PreK-12 Appropriations, Policy & Steering Committee On Ways & Means, and Rules. Similar Bill, [HB 655](#) by Carl Domino (R- Palm Beach), awaits hearing in Finance & Tax Council.

TABOR

[SJR 2420](#) by Sen. Mike Haridopolos (R-Brevard), also known as TABOR, proposes an amendment to the state constitution to limit state and local government tax revenues and, if passed by the electorate, would require voter approval of new taxes and fees. It is scheduled to be heard in the Community Affairs Committee on March 23. No House version has been filed.

CHILD WELFARE

Independent Living

Each year, older foster youth make the difficult transition to independent living. Many of these kids have spent their entire lives in the foster care system drifting from placement to placement. They need strong support - from the state of Florida and our communities - as they move toward adulthood. Unfortunately, HCA 4 passed out of the House Health Care Appropriations Committee on Tuesday with language limiting the Road to Independence Award to an amount "not to exceed amount of \$675 per month." This is tantamount to a 50% reduction. In addition, the bill prorates the award in the month the youth turns age 18. Currently the youth gets a full-month subsidy. The most expensive month for a former foster youth is the one in which they strike out on their own. They desperately need funds to assist with utility and housing deposits. Without the strongest level of Road to Independence support, former foster youth could wind up homeless or in prison. We urge the House and Senate to maintain existing levels of support for the Road to Independence Program

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. No action this week.

HEALTH CARE

Florida KidCare

[SB 2082](#) by Sen. Nan Rich (D-Broward) provides that: children under the age of 1 may participate in the Medikids program; an eligible child who is a lawful immigrant may enroll in the Florida Kidcare Program regardless of the child's date of entry; authorizes Kidcare coverage for temporomandibular joint disease. provides that Medicaid-eligible children are deemed eligible for 12 months of coverage regardless of any change in circumstances, etc. Referred to Health Regulation, Banking & Insurance, Health & Human Services Appropriations, and Way & Means. No action thus far. No action on similar bill, HB 1545 by Juan Zapata (R-Miami).

JUVENILE JUSTICE

Bill Would Eliminate Life Sentences for Juveniles

[SB 184](#) 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. Approved last week by Senate Criminal Justice Committee, the

proposal is next slated for the Senate Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations Committee. The House companion ([HB 23](#)) also passed the Public Safety & Domestic Security Policy Committee, and is now before the House Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations Committee. There was no action in either house on the proposal this week.

OTHER ISSUES

Booster Seats

[SB 316](#) by Sen. Thad Altman (R-Brevard) 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. No action this week.

CALL TO ACTION: Please call Reps. Dave Murzin and Dean Cannon to urge them to allow the bill to move forward in the House.

FEDERAL NEWS

Early Learning Challenge Fund, Child Nutrition

The U.S. Senate has stripped the Early Learning Challenge Fund from the Higher Education bill. Education Committee chairs are talking about other possible vehicles, but it is not clear what the other options might be. The Senate Agriculture committee released the Chairman's Mark of the Child Nutrition Act (markup next week) and it has some positive things, but it does not include opportunities to increase access to preschool CACFP.

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 Petrila, 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.