

CAPITOL CONNECTION

Florida Children's Services Council

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



Week One

March 5, 2010

Children's Services Bill Heard in First Senate Committee

On Thursday, Children's Services bill, SB 1216, made its first stop in the Senate Committee on Children, Families and Elder Affairs. Presented by sponsor Sen. Joe Negron, the bill would require Children's Services Councils to have their budgets, millage and land purchases approved by the county commission. The bill would add another county commissioner to the membership of the Councils' governing boards and would require voters to reauthorize their local Children's Services Councils every eight years via referendum. After committee members raised a number of questions, Sen., Negron agreed to temporarily postpone the bill. The bill is expected to be on the committee's agenda again in the third week of session. The companion bill in the House -- HB 1227 by Rep. Debbie Mayfield -- received its committee references this week. Its first stop will be Military and Local Affairs.

A distinguished group of business people, citizen leaders, CSC board members and child advocates attended the meeting to address the existing accountability of CSCs, and the importance of preserving what local voters had decided for their own communities. Many thanks go to Maria Alonso (Chair, The Children's Trust of Miami-Dade County), Judge Ronald Alvarez (Palm Beach County Juvenile Court Judge), Dr. Mel Jurado (Member, Hillsborough County Early Learning Coalition), Barbara Allan (business person from Palm Beach County), Ted Granger (President, United Way of Florida), Kathy Adams (Board Chair, Palm Beach Early Learning Coalition) and Emelio Benetiz (Childnet, Broward County) for taking time to travel at their own expense to share their insights with state lawmakers. Florida CSC will continue to provide updates on this bill as session moves forward.

Lawmakers Get Down to Business

As Florida faces its third consecutive year of budget shortfalls, the Governor, along with House Speaker Larry Cretul and Senate President Jeff Atwater, attempted to set the tone for the 85th Regular Legislative Session. Their message was clear. Over the next 60 days, legislators should focus on efficiency, transparency and accountability. And with a projected budget shortfall of \$3 billion, the painful and all-too-familiar "belt-tightening" will continue. Gov. Crist also emphasized that his top

TAKE NOTE

FCSC Capitol Hill Days

March 16-17
Tallahassee

Rally for Afterschool

April 20, 2010
Washington, DC

Children's Week Seeks Nominations for Innovation Awards

Children's Week has launched its first-ever Community Innovation Awards to recognize communities that are pursuing systemic change through collaboration and meshing of programs and funding to address critical issues facing children and families. The awards will be given annually to communities that embrace collaboration by working across multiple sectors and providers to address problems facing children 0-18 and their families. The awards are presented by United Way of Florida and The Lawton Chiles Foundation.

[Download the nomination form here.](#) The deadline to

priority for the 2010 Legislative Session would be to maintain jobs and prosperity for Floridians.

In the interest of providing relief to Florida businesses -- and combating Florida's nearly 12 percent unemployment rate -- the House and Senate moved swiftly to pass an unemployment compensation bill on the first day of session. The bill ([HB 7033](#)), which delays a scheduled increase in unemployment compensation taxes, was also signed by the Governor on Day One.

Among other priorities, Senate President Atwater said he will ask voters to reconsider the class size amendment that passed in 2002. House Speaker Cretul said he would be looking at agency consolidations. With half of Senate members and all of the House members up for election in November, most of them are unlikely to raise taxes this year. That leaves two ways to balance the budget: cut services, and/or raid trust funds.

House Releases Early Budget Allocations

House Speaker Larry Cretul released his initial budget allocations Thursday, spending the largest share on public schools. He earmarked \$9 billion for schools, with \$600 million coming out of trust funds in an effort to avoid new taxes or fees. While that amount is a 9 percent increase in state funding, it is largely offset by a loss in local dollars due to declining property tax revenues. Cretul's allocations for health and human services totaled \$6.7 billion in general revenue, supplemented with another \$5 billion from state trust funds (mostly federal matching cash). State dollars going to health and social programs are up 19 percent over last year in Cretul's allocations - but an anticipated reduction of more than \$1 billion in federal stimulus money and the sharp spike in Medicaid enrollment diminishes the effect of the extra state money. The long-range financial outlook adopted by the Legislative Budget Commission anticipates a shortfall exceeding \$5 billion for FY 2011-12 due primarily to the full effect of the flame out of federal stimulus funding," Cretul said in the memo.

IN OTHER STATE NEWS

Early Learning Advisory Council Meets with Governor

The Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC), composed of the board chairs of Florida's 31 early learning coalitions, met in the Capitol City this week. Florida CSC CEO Vivian Alarcon also serves on ELAC as the designee of House Speaker Larry Cretul. The group heard an update from AWI Director Cynthia Lorenzo, Early Learning Director Brittany Birken and several reports on topics ranging from Whole Child, the early learning information system, and key legislative issues. The two-day meeting concluded with a meeting with Gov. Charlie Crist who thanked the volunteers for their service and assured them of his commitment to maintaining and improving Florida's early learning system.

Florida Named Finalist for "Race to the Top" Federal Dollars

submit nominations is Friday, March 12 by 5 p.m. The awards will be presented at the 2010 Children's Week Community Innovation Awards Luncheon on Monday, April 12, 2010 in Tallahassee. For more information regarding the luncheon, please contact Jason Zaborske at info@childrensweek.org or (850) 251-7274. For information regarding the 2010 Children's Week Community Innovation Awards, please contact Ted Granger at tgranger@uwof.org or (850) 488-8287.

First-Ever Florida Prosperity Caucus to Convene March 10

The Florida Prosperity Partnership, a statewide organization dedicated to fair tax policy, improving financial literacy and expanding free tax preparation, has partnered with Rep. Alan Williams (D-Tallahassee) to convene the first-ever Prosperity Caucus of the Florida Legislature. Many Children's Services Councils across the state are involved with wealth-building opportunities and even serve as Volunteer Income Tax Assistance sites. The Caucus will meet on March 10 from 12:00 - 1:30 p.m. in House Office Building, Room 28. Participants will discuss opportunities to help all Floridians be able to live the American Dream.

Florida was named as one of 16 finalists that could receive up to \$1 billion in federal grant money for public schools that could dramatically change the way the state's schools operate. Race to the Top, the Obama administration's \$4.35 billion competitive grant program, awards money to schools that present bold education reform plans. And if the state gets the money, the way schools do business could dramatically change. The state's plan calls for a merit-based pay system for teachers as well as heightened graduation standards, both of which are the subject of current legislation before Florida lawmakers. Education Commissioner Eric Smith will travel to Washington D.C. in a few weeks to present the plans to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and other U.S. Department of Education officials.

Forty states and the District of Columbia submitted applications for the grant, which were scored on a 500 point scale. Duncan said the 15 states and D.C. all scored more than 400 points. The winners will be chosen in April after the interview process concludes. The sixteen finalists are Colorado, Delaware, Washington D.C., Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina and Tennessee.

EARLY LEARNING

Early Learning

[SB 2394](#) by Sen. Rudy Garcia (R-Miami-Dade) would transfer the Office of Early Learning within the Department of Education and the child care facility licensing responsibilities of the Department of Children and Families to the Office of Early Learning within the Agency for Workforce Innovation. The bill is scheduled to be heard first in the Committee on Children, Families and Elder Affairs. No date has been set yet.

HEALTHY CHILDREN

KidCare

[SB 2082](#) was filed by Sen. Nan Rich (D-Broward). The bill provides that children under the age of 1 may participate in the Medikids program. It also provides that an eligible child who is a lawful immigrant may enroll in the Florida KidCare program regardless of the child's date of entry, and would allow Medicaid-eligible children to be deemed eligible for 12 months of coverage regardless of any change in circumstances. A similar bill ([HB 1545](#)) has been filed in the House by Rep. Juan Zapata (R-Miami-Dade).

Vaccinations

[HB 117](#) by Rep. Kevin Ambler (R-Hillsborough) would have created impediments to vaccination and potential public health issues. The bill was temporarily postponed in its first committee and then was withdrawn.

OTHER ISSUES

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

Children's Trust Act of Collier County

[SB 1162](#) by Sen. Garrett Richter (R-Collier) place a ballot measure before the voters in Collier County to propose creation of an independent special district to provide children's services in Collier County. If passed by electors, it provides for a governing board, membership, terms, and powers and duties of the board. It also requires certain reports and audits. The bill has not received committee references yet.

TABOR

[SJR 2420](#) by Sen. Mike Haridopolos (R-Brevard), known as the Taxpayer Bill of Rights, is a controversial bill that was filed last year and stalled in committee. The bill would limit revenue increases for all local governments to inflation, plus population growth, unless voters approve it or a supermajority of local officials take a vote. The bill has been referred to five committees. Its first stop will be the Community Affairs Committee.

Concurrent Custody

[HB 25](#) by Rep. Rich Glorioso (R-Hillsborough) and [SB 334](#) by Sen. Ronda Storms (R-Hillsborough), establishishes concurrent custody for extended family caregivers who are caring for their kin children. Both bills moved forward during the first week of session. HB 25 was unanimously approved by the Criminal and Civil Justice Policy Council and will now go to the House floor for a vote. SB 334 was unanimously approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee and goes next to the Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations Committee. The bill will provide relief to the thousands of grandparents and other relatives who face barriers in obtaining services when they don't have a court order showing custody.

Call to Action: Ask your delegation members to vote "yes" on these bills, which will help kinship families to provide appropriate care for the children living with them while also protecting the rights of biological parents.

Booster Seat Bill

[SB 316](#) by Sen. Thad Altman (R-Brevard) passed its first committee and is scheduled to be heard in the Criminal Justice Committee next week. The bill would require booster seats, in addition to seat belts, for children aged 4 through 7. It also provides certain exceptions, and redefines the term "motor vehicle" to exclude certain vehicles from such requirements. The companion in the House is [HB 387](#) by Reps. Rich Glorioso (R-Hillsborough), Richard Steinberg (D-Miami-Dade), and others.

Call to Action: Call to support Rep. Glorioso who is working hard for the House bill to be heard in its first committee of reference - Roads and Bridges.

Special Senior Services District

[SB 146](#) by Sen. Nan Rich (D-Broward) passed the Senate Committee on Children, Families and Elder Affairs. It would authorize counties to create, by ordinance, an independent special district to provide senior

services throughout the county. The special districts could also levy property taxes to fund those services if the majority of voters in the county approved doing so. The bill provides the membership of the governing council, powers and duties of the council, and reporting requirements.
