

State Update

Down to the Wire on “Cover All Kids”

“Cover All Kids,” the proposal to extend availability of CHIP coverage to all children in Pennsylvania, has received a fair amount of legislative attention recently. However, the enactment of enabling legislation has yet to be accomplished.

The Senate Banking and Insurance Committee and the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committees held a joint public hearing on “Cover All Kids” Sept. 18. A number of CHIP contractors, the Departments of Health and Insurance, the PA Academy of Pediatrics, and PPC’s President and CEO Joan Benso testified at the hearing.

Benso reminded the committee members that 133,600 uninsured children are waiting for the General Assembly to fulfill the promise that legislative leaders made in July to enact “Cover All Kids” enabling legislation in October. “I was quite shocked we didn’t have this in June,” Benso said, outlining for the committees the many potential benefits of passage of the legislation: better access to care and better health care outcomes for Pennsylvania’s children; better use of more appropriate sources of care (less reliance on emergency rooms for routine care); better school performance by children with health insurance, and the reduction in uncompensated care for Pennsylvania health care providers.

Benso noted that the issue of uninsured children is of concern to us all and crosses the political spectrum. Since its inception, Democrats and Republicans alike have provided strong support for CHIP legislation and for the necessary funding. She remarked that it is time for all legislators to embrace “Cover All Kids” and provide health care coverage to all Pennsylvania children.

The House Democratic Policy Committee’s Healthcare Excellence and Accountability Response Team continued its series of hearings on “Cover All Kids” throughout the Commonwealth. Children’s advocates, pediatricians and other health providers, public health advocates, and Administration officials have testified at the hearings on the need to enact this legislation. PPC also testified at a hearing in Kingston, PA.

Negotiations and discussions among legislative leaders, the Rendell Administration and concerned parties, including PPC and CHIP contractors continue. If the General Assembly is going to keep its promise to enact “Cover All Kids” legislation, it only has a few session days in which to accomplish it. The House is in session for a total of seven

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days in October before breaking for the November General Election; the Senate is in session for five days. It is not entirely certain that the General Assembly will convene a lame duck session after the General Election. Therefore, it is imperative that action be taken on "Cover All Kids" in October.

PPC will continue our strong advocacy for the enactment of this important and historical legislation. We will keep you apprised of important developments.

ACTION ALERT

Please contact your legislator and urge him or her to enact "Cover All Kids" in October. Click here to send an e-mail alert to your members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly.

http://www.capwiz.com/papartnerships/issues/alert/?alertid=9063901&type=ST&show_alert=1

State Revenue Update

The Department of Revenue reported that the state collected \$2.5 billion in General Fund revenue in September, which is \$76.5 million, or 3.2 percent, more than anticipated. Fiscal year-to-date General Fund collections total \$5.8 billion, which is \$55.7 million, or 1 percent, above the official estimate.

Education Update

High School Reform Initiatives Receive \$19 Million Investment

Gov. Rendell announced recently that three high school reform initiatives that increase academic rigor, allow high school students to earn college credits, and provide enhanced career and college counseling

Keeping Lights On Afterschool

The members of the House and Senate expressed support for and appreciation of afterschool programs by unanimously adopting three resolutions designating October 12, 2006 as Lights on Afterschool! Day in Pennsylvania. The resolutions note that nearly 1.8 million school-age children and youth in Pennsylvania return from school to a home where each parent is working and many of these children are unsupervised for 20 to 25 hours per week. The resolutions proclaim that afterschool programs provide safe, challenging, engaging and fun learning experiences to help children and youth develop social, emotional, physical, cultural and academic skills. Senator Rhoades (R-Schuylkill) introduced the resolution in the Senate. Representatives Argall (R-Schuylkill) and Wheatley (D-Allegheny) introduced separate resolutions in the House.

Linking Farms and Schools

The Pennsylvania Senate unanimously approved legislation that will promote the state's agricultural products and encourage young people to eat a healthier diet. Senate Bill 1209, the Health Farms and Health Schools Initiative, would coordinate the delivery of locally-grown farm products to school students. The aim of the legislation is to help children and their families make healthier food choices. The Initiative was piloted in several Philadelphia schools and currently serves more than 900 students in the Philadelphia region. The measure now moves to the House for further consideration.

to students will receive \$19 million in an effort to keep teens in school and curb the dropout rate.

According to the Department of Education, Project 720 and Dual Enrollment are expanding and are each receiving \$8 million, while College & Career Counseling is getting a first-ever investment of \$3 million to be shared by 19 school districts.

Under Project 720, the state's high school reform initiative, 32 more schools will receive funding bringing the total number of schools involved in the initiative to 107. The Governor announced that nearly 30,000 students in 313 school districts will benefit from dual enrollment grants that allow them to earn college credits while in high school. Currently, 77 postsecondary institutions are participating in the dual enrollment program, including 13 of the state's 14 community colleges and 12 of the 14 State System of Higher Education universities. Dual enrollment is currently funded by the state at \$8 million.

Pre-K Regulations Passed by State Board

The State Board of Education adopted the pre-K regulations at its meeting on Sept. 20. Under the new regulations, publicly-funded pre-kindergarten class sizes would be capped at 20 and must be open to children with disabilities. Next step in the process is approval by the state's regulatory review board, Attorney General's office and state House and Senate Education Committees.

Federal Budget Update

As previously reported, the new federal fiscal year (FFY 2007) began on October 1 without a federal budget in place. Before recessing for the November General Election, Congress provided funding for government agencies via stopgap spending provisions under a conference report on defense appropriations. The stopgap spending provisions expire on November 17.

In the House, 24 moderate Republican members sent a "Dear Colleague" letter to House Majority Leader Boehner, reminding him of the agreement they struck regarding the House Budget Resolution. The moderates agreed to vote for the House Budget Resolution, as long as funding under the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill would be increased \$7 billion over the President's request.

New Academic Standards for Career Education and Work Passed

The Pennsylvania State Board of Education and the General Assembly recently approved new Academic Standards for Career Education and Work. The standards - part of the Chapter 4 regulations - were published in the Pennsylvania Bulletin, Volume 36, Number 27 on July 8. A complete copy of the Career Education and Work Standards can be accessed online at:

www.pabulletin.com/secure/data/vol36/36-27/1267.html.

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Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children has created candidate briefing papers and a series of candidate survey questions for use this election season. If you would like to access any of the candidate surveys or briefing papers (covering topics such as health care for children, education funding, school readiness and child care subsidy) please visit the Children & the Elections page on our web site:
<http://www.ppartnerships.org/elections.asp>

The current version of the House Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill increases spending \$4.1 billion above the President's recommendation. The group of 24 moderate Republicans calls on Boehner to live up to the agreement by including an additional \$3 billion in the bill. The group notes that according to the agreement, the additional funds "will not come from mandatory programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps, foster care programs and others that serve the very people we are trying to help. Any offsets should not reduce services or adversely affect the neediest among us." Pennsylvania Representatives Platts, Dent, Gerlach, Fitzpatrick, and Weldon signed the letter.

As previously reported, Senator Arlen Specter is leading a similar effort in the Senate to add \$2

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billion to the Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Bill. By adding the funds, the bill will exceed the President's recommendation by \$7 billion.

Medicaid Commission Update

VOICES for America's Children reports that the 15 voting members and 15 non-voting members of the Medicaid Commission will submit seven recommendations by Oct. 18 that cover all areas of Medicaid reform. The Commission will then evaluate and choose those that will comprise the final report, scheduled for release at year's end.

VOICES staff testified at a Medicaid Commission hearing in September and urged Commission members to keep the needs of children at the forefront.

SCHIP Peril Means States Could Lose Health Insurance Funding

The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), created in 1997 to expand health care coverage to millions of uninsured children in the U.S., faces federal funding shortfalls for fiscal year 2007. These shortfalls come at a time when the Census Bureau recently reported that the number of children without health insurance grew to more than 8 million in 2005, the first time the proportion of uninsured children has risen since 1998.

SCHIP is a block grant with a fixed annual funding level. Therefore, the federal funding states receive under SCHIP does not keep pace with the rising cost of health care or population growth.

Since SCHIP is up for reauthorization in 2007, Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children will be working with fellow state and national advocates to ensure reauthorization of SCHIP and increased funding for the program. If Congress does not increase annual block grant funding beyond the FY 2007 level of \$5.04 billion, shortfalls for states will worsen each year. Keep reading CapWatch for updates on SCHIP.