



Legislative Update

#0007 for Mar. 19, 2007

March Madness is upon us. I refer not to the tribal frenzy that grips hoop fans this month but to the last-minute rush of bills flung in the hopper to beat the Senate's bill-drafting deadline. That fateful day came and went on March 13. We'll have April Madness when state revenue estimates turn into solid numbers. (It's called "The April Surprise," and like all surprises it can be good or bad. Current rumors hold that state revenues will come in a tad ahead of estimates.) Bill deadlines in the House will spark May Madness. The rush to complete the state budget by 06/30 will prompt June Madness, but if something goes wrong – and it usually does – we might have to endure July Madness, August Madness. . . . I'll never forget that infamous session when the solons fussed all the way to Halloween.

We're in! The Social Services Consortium has made a place for itself at the legislative rain dance, and among the swirl of new bills collecting in the General Assembly's pond, you'll find numerous measures straight from our legislative agenda. Getting bills introduced is not the same as getting them enacted, but we're on our way, and who knows? If we dance hard enough, we might be able to catch a few buckets of rain.

At the request of the Consortium, Sen. Wm. Purcell (D-Scotland), who is a Co-Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee – Health & Human Services, has introduced **S 863 Child Welfare Collaborative Funds**, which would appropriate \$4.619 million to expand the Child Welfare Education program to all the state-supported universities that have an accredited BSW or MSW program. The measure is co-sponsored by Sen. Charlie Dannelly (D-Mecklenburg) and Sen. Katie G. Dorsett (D-Guilford). Rep. Martha Alexander (D-Mecklenburg), a Co-Chair of the House Appropriations Committee (a.k.a. HAPP or "Big Approps"), has also agreed to the Consortium's request to introduce the House version, but we have no bill number at this time. Rep. Beverly Earle (D-Mecklenburg) has agreed to co-sponsor. Rep. Earle is a former Co-Chair of HAPP. Thanks to our sponsors, the measure has a fighting chance of being included in the House and Senate versions of the state budget.

Another money bill that has the Consortium's heartfelt blessing is **H 854 Funds for the Child Care Subsidy Program**. Gov. Mike Easley's proposed 2007-2008 budget includes an additional \$8.4 million to take an estimated 2,000 children off the child care waiting list. Last week the NCACDSS's Executive Committee voted to seek a doubling of that sum to \$16.8 million, but H 854 ups the ante by asking for \$23 million to take 6,000 children off the waiting list. H 854 is sponsored by Reps. Alexander, Weiss (D-Wake), Carney (D-Mecklenburg), and Farmer-Butterfield (D-Wilson/Edgecombe). The Senate companion version, **S 755**, is sponsored by Sens. Purcell, Hagan (D-Guilford), Garrou (D-Forsyth), Atwater (D-Chatham/Durham/Lee), Berger (D-Franklin/Granville/Vance/Warren), Dorsett, Kinnaird (D-Orange/Person), Queen (D-Avery/Haywood/Madison/McDowell/Mitchell/Yancey) and Rand (D-Cumberland). Again, there's no way of telling what will happen when the Representatives or Senators huddle in "The Bunker" on the sixth floor of the Legislative Office Building and start

horse trading on money matters, but this measure at least enjoys the advantage of some very potent sponsors.

A clutch of bills address concerns raised by the Commission on Aging and the House's Guardianship Study Committee.

H 795 Funds for Guardianship Services would appropriate \$5,121,783 in new DHHS funds to boost guardianship services provided local DSSs, LMEs, health departments, and county departments on aging. The chief sponsors are Rep. Alice Bordsen (D-Alamance) and Rep. Melanie W. Goodwin (D-Montgomery/Richmond).

Other aging-related bills include:

H 687 would cut the fees that clerks of court can charge on invested funds and says the clerks of court cannot invest any of the incompetent person's funds until a guardian of the person has been appointed.

H 794 would raise the ceiling on the amount of a ward's personal property that a guardian can sell without a court order (\$1,500 to \$15,000).

H 796 would permit the clerks of court to decide whether persons deemed incompetent adults could retain their driving privileges

H 797 addresses power of attorney, conflicts of interest, the pecking order as to whom would be appointed a guardian or not, and status reports on the ward.

H 798 would change the term "incompetent adult" and all versions thereof to "incapacitated adult."

H 799 would – with a few exceptions – give the guardian of the person the same responsibilities as the guardian of a minor, permit the clerks of court to decide whether guardians must post and maintain a bond, and set forth the duties of a guardian.

H 811 addresses the handling of venue questions, procedures of applications, payment of a ward's debts, foreign guardians, restoration to competency and more.

H 772 and **H 826** address adult care home issues. **H772** says DHHS is not obliged to issue a new license for an adult care home that changes ownership if the home still has outstanding fees, fines, etc. It also takes out the 30-day deadline for local DSSs to complete investigations of complaints or violations. **H826** puts a two-year freeze on the issuance of new licenses to new home care agencies that "intend to offer in-home aide services."

New label. When the feds want something, they usually get it. **H 719 Rename Food Stamp Program** would drop the old "Food Stamp" moniker and substitute "Food Assistance in North Carolina" as per Congressional direction.

Speaking of labels. . . When the subject comes up, I usually introduce myself as an "advocate" rather than a "lobbyist." A church friend recently asked me the difference. I thought a moment and said, "It's the difference between Ruth and Rahab. Rahab would do it for anyone who paid."



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