



Legislative Update

#0011 for April 16, 2007

Crunch time! Now is the time for all members of the Social Services Consortium to come to the aid of our legislative agenda. The “Big Chairs” of the House Appropriations Committee have given their subcommittee chairs budget targets that *cut* Gov. Easley’s already-sparse expansion budget. The numbers vary depending on who you ask and when you ask them, but there was talk last week of snipping \$55 million from the Governor’s HHS expansion budget. Education, environment and other areas were facing cuts of their own. Is this how the solons plan to fund the proposed Medicaid cap? (see next article) The other jaw of this vice is time. House Speaker Joe Hackney has announced that he wants the House to finish its version of the state budget by end of the first week in May and scoot it over to the Senate. Slash here, slash there, cram something new in the hole, and you’re done.

Sympathetic senators might restore or add items we care about, but if there’s nothing in the House budget for those items, the task of getting Senate support for any changes gets very tough, and every change would have to run the gauntlet of the House-Senate Conference Committee.

Be that as it may, things we care about are in real danger.

(01) Our request for \$4.619 million for statewide expansion of the Child Welfare Education Collaborative was not in Gov. Easley’s expansion budget, and though we have House and Senate bills with important sponsors, what counts is to get the provisions of our bills in the budget itself. At last meeting of the Joint HHS Appropriations Committee, the subcommittee co-chairs trotted out a short list of funded items, and our CWEC funding was not among them. Starting on the House side, we’ve got to convince key lawmakers that this measure is a “must-do item.” More on that in a moment.

(02) Gov. Easley’s budget included \$8.4 million to take 2,000 more children off the daycare waiting list. That item is on the legislators’ short list, but the Consortium wanted to double that sum, and two House members have introduced a bill that would almost triple the appropriation and make places for 6,000 children. We won’t get more than \$8.4 million without some effort, and in the current legislative environment, even the lesser amount is not a sure thing.

(03) The Governor’s proposal to extend Medicaid coverage to foster care children until they reach age 21 remains on the legislators’ short list, but watch out. Any expansion of Medicaid benefits – however worthy or modest in cost – is a high profile target for budget cutters.

(04) The Consortium wants \$1.5 million to support an Adult Protective Services pilot program, but like the CWEC funding, the item didn’t make the Governor’s expansion budget or the legislators’ short list.

*I strongly suggest that we focus our immediate advocacy efforts on the item in greatest jeopardy – the Child Welfare Education funds. The attachment that accompanies this update shows all the chairs and co-chairs of the House Appropriations Committee. If one of them represents your county or any part of your county, **please e-***

mail him or her immediately using the information provided. THANK the ones who sponsored or co-sponsored H 937 Child Welfare Education Funds (they're identified) and ask them for their continued support. If your county doesn't have a representative among the chairs or co-chairs, please pick one who represents a nearby county and contact that legislator. Explain the statewide implications of the CWEC program. If we can generate enough calls and e-mails, CWEC funding will go into the House budget, and we will be one big step closer to victory.

Please see the attachment and act now! Thanks!

How do you spell relief? HB-1424. This is the big one – or close to it – and only an Elvis sighting could have generated more enthusiasm in the N.C. House last week. Reps. Bill Owens (D-Pasquotank), Mickey Michaux (D-Durham), John Stam (R-Wake), and Doug Yongue (D-Scotland) introduced HB 1424 Medicaid County Share Reduced, and 115 other House members immediately jumped on the bandwagon. It probably would have been unanimous, but the Speaker of the House doesn't sponsor bills.

As its title implies, HB 1424 is a cap bill rather than a complete relief bill. There's no mention of a phase out of the county share in the near or long term. To do that next year, the state would have to conjure half a billion dollars from the General Fund, which is highly unlikely. But HB 1424 takes a long stride in that direction. It would (01) cap each county's Medicaid share at its 2005-2006 level, (02) appropriate \$100 million for a cap in 2007-2008, with \$10 million of that earmarked to provide relief for counties with the greatest number of Medicaid recipients as a percentage of total population, and (03) appropriate another \$154 million for 2008-2009 with \$15 million of that set aside for the hardest hit counties. The set aside funds "shall be allocated to each eligible county pro rata based on the total amount of funds appropriated for this purpose."

So, everyone in the House likes this bill and wants to be identified with it. But why didn't its backers – including our friends at the N.C. Association of County Commissioners – prompt the introduction of a Senate companion? That may be where the shoe will pinch. Key senators may have different ideas about this issue, and it will be interesting to see who wants less sage in their sausage and how strongly they feel about the recipe.

A call, e-mail or note thanking your House member for his or her support of this bill would be very much in order, but if your time and energy is limited, other items from our Social Services Consortium agenda need your attention right away. Please read on.

The State Amphibian. Our beloved Old North State is not only blessed with a state tree, a state flower and a state dog, but we also have a state spider and may soon boast an official leafy green vegetable (the collard). A House member who represents a coastal district wants to add yet another symbol to our pantheon. He has introduced a bill calling on the General Assembly to adopt the bullfrog (*rana catesbeiana*) as the state amphibian. I hate to sound like that ex-drill instructor on "Mail Call," but if we're going to adopt a state amphibian, I propose we chose something really cool, such as the Light Assault Vehicle 25 (*marinecorpus kickbuttus*). This baby has eight wheels, can operate on land or water and packs a 25mm cannon and two machine guns. Specimens of this unique amphibian can be found in and around Camp Lejeune, and if they were gussied up

a bit, they'd be a big hit in parades and other public functions. Gov. Easley could drive one of these on a NASCAR track or anywhere else, and he'd be hard put to wreck it. I invite you to examine the pictures below and decide for yourself.



Tom Bennett

Executive Director, NCACDSS