



The N.C. House is racing to meet a self-imposed deadline. The tight schedule will force members to make crucial decisions about the state budget by next week. That puts a number of things we care about in grave jeopardy. Speaker Joe Hackney (D-Orange) wants the House to finish its version of the budget by the end of the first week in May. Whether the House members will make that goal is a fair question, but it's abundantly clear that they are trying. The "Big Chairs" of the House Appropriations Committee have reportedly set budget targets that slash big chunks from Gov. Mike Easley's \$20 billion budget. Roughly \$55 million of those cuts would come from the Health & Human Services budget alone. Our battle now is to get our legislative items on the short list of appropriations that the House leaders are willing to add or restore. Our list includes: (01) \$4.619 million to expand the Child Welfare Education Collaborative to *all* of the state-supported colleges and universities that have accredited BSW or MSW programs, (02) at least \$8.4 million (the sum the Governor recommended) to take another 2,000 children off the daycare waiting list – though we'd like to have twice that, (03) support for foster care youths up to age 21 is still on the House short list but clings to a very exposed position, and (04) more money for Child & Family Team facilitators.

I'm going to repeat an appeal I made last week. ***Let's focus our immediate advocacy efforts on the item in greatest jeopardy – the Child Welfare Education Collaborative funds.*** We should concentrate on members of the House Appropriations Committee and Speaker Joe Hackney. A list that includes HAPP members and Speaker Hackney accompanies this update. Please call or e-mail the House member who represents you. THANK the ones who sponsored or co-sponsored H 937 (they're identified) and ask for their continued support. Urge the others to support the measure. If your county doesn't have a representative on Appropriations, then please pick one who represents a nearby county and contact them. Everyone can and should send an e-mail to Speaker Hackney. 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.

U-Turn on pre-service training. On April 12, one month after voting to support HB 1159 Pre-Service Training Exemption/Certain CPS Workers, the NCACDSS Executive Board voted to withdraw support for the bill. After receiving assurances that state DSS would review, publicize and formalize its waiver process for CPS pre-training requirements and make it more flexible, Association leaders voted to change our stance on HB 1159. State DSS had objected to the bill saying it would weaken the training process that has been so recently praised in the federal Child and Family Services Review. State DSS Director Sherry Bradsher and other state DSS staff met with NCACDSS leaders on April 11 to voice their objections to the bill and say that they would oppose it in the General Assembly. Once the Association changed course, the bill's sponsor, Rep. Jeanne Farmer-Butterfield (D-Edgecombe/Wilson), was informed of the reversal. She declined to say that she would withdraw the bill, but she said she would

consider the idea. The task now is to work with state DSS and obtain some of the flexibility that staff-strapped local DSS directors need so badly.

Anything can happen at the Puzzle Palace. Some member directors have called the Association office to ask me about the Medicaid relief bill, HB 1424 Medicaid County Share Reduced. Will it pass? Well, with 119 House sponsors and the enthusiastic blessing of our friends at the N.C. Association of County Commissioners, it seems almost certain to pass that chamber. The legislation would: (01) provide immediate and permanent Medicaid relief to all counties, (02) aim additional relief at hardest hit counties, (03) avoid a revenue swap that proved to be a deal-breaker in previous measures, and (04) cap county costs at last year's levels. Significantly, the bill does not specifically phase out the counties' shares, but the bill's sponsors have touted it as a step in that direction. The bill calls for \$100 million for 2007-2008 and another \$154 in the second year of the biennium.

Despite unanimous support in the House (the Speaker never signs bills), the measure may receive a less enthusiastic reception on the Senate side of the Puzzle Palace. Sen. Tony Rand (D-Cumberland) has already introduced a revised version of the "tax swap" Medicaid relief bill he rolled out last session. Is he wed to his bill? And where does Senate President Pro Tem Marc Basnight (D-Dare) stand?

Remember that – unlike Sen. Rand's bill – HB 1424 is not a tax swap bill, implementing it would cost the state \$254 million over two years. Where will the state get that money? Will the solons rob Peter to pay Paul (i.e., pay for county Medicaid relief out of money that would otherwise go for HHS and education)? Are the arrangements for that "robbery" already underway in the House? Though some columnists and commentators make a living at it, trying to anticipate what 170 state legislators will do is darn near impossible. It's a game no bookie would touch.

Remember the so-called "Buncombe Resolution" that generated such a stir last fall? That was the proposed statutory change that would give county commissioners authority over commissions, boards and agencies – regardless of the county's size. The Association of County Commissioners voted not to add it to their legislative agenda, and the Social Services Consortium sighed in relief. Though the current statute limits that privilege to counties with populations over 450,000 souls, five Senate Republicans have introduced S 1538 County Commissioners Authority/Boards & Agencies, which would sweep away that restriction and permit any county board of commissioners to take up this authority. The chief sponsor is Sen. Jean R. Preston (R-Carteret). Her co-sponsors are Sens. Tom Apodaca (R-Buncombe/Henderson/Polk), Stan Bingham (R-Davidson/Guilford), Harry Brown (R-Jones/Onslow), and Richard Stevens (R-Wake). This is no small thing, and the Social Services Consortium will vigorously oppose this measure, but we're not sounding sirens, blowing trumpets and shooting flares just yet. The chief reason is that the bill's sponsors are all of the minority party, and the Democrats have a very firm grip on the Senate. If the bill starts moving and looks as though it may go somewhere, we'll send up flares – lots of them.

No movement at this time on another three bills of concern to the Consortium. They are S821, S824 and S1077 – all introduced by Sen. Ellie Kinnaird (D-

Chatham/Orange/Person). These bills address the criteria for non-secure custody, the appeals process in custody cases, and the discovery process and time lines in custody cases. The Consortium is concerned that all of these bills would tilt the legal system too far in favor of errant parents and generate procedural mischief. These concerns have been communicated to Sen. Kinnaird, and all three bills have been placed on the Consortium watch list. If they start to move, so will we.

Ten Things Every N.C. Legislator Should Know:

- (01) NC FAST is not a diet plan or a laxative.
- (02) TPR does not stand for Terrible Parents Rule.
- (03) DSS does not stand for Dump Stuff Steadily.
- (04) BSW does not stand for Burdens, Sweat & Worry.
- (05) Do not confuse Medicaid Relief with Gas-X or Bean-O.
- (06) Foster children aren't the offspring of someone named Foster.
- (07) Most grocery stores accept VISA, MasterCard or Amex. None accept fishing licenses or voter registration cards.
- (08) "Budget" originally comes from a French word that means "little bag." The word can be used as a verb, but even then, it does not mean "shaft the poor."
- (09) "Abstinence Only" is what we should teach legislators about political contributions.
- (10) "Reform" means "make better," not "make worse."



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