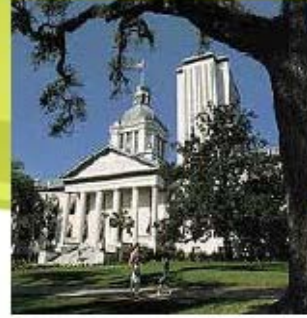


# Capitol Connection

Florida Children's Council



Week Three - January 28, 2012

## EARLY LEARNING UNDER ATTACK

Three bills moving through the House of Representatives in the Business and Consumer Affairs, PreK-12 Appropriations, and Rules Committees threaten the foundational education criteria essential to ensuring the effectiveness of the school readiness program and meeting the federal intent of the funds. In the Business and Consumer Affairs draft committee bill, the two greatest concerns include the complete elimination of the educational criteria and redefining the intent of the program as merely a workforce support. The educational standards outlined in the School Readiness Act are essential for making certain Florida's children from low-income working families have access to quality early learning programs. Among the proposed sweeping changes to Florida's early learning system are:

- Eliminating accountability to ensure educational outcomes for children.
- Prohibiting screenings and assessments, including the ability to screen children for hearing, vision, and developmental delays. This would have a devastating impact on developmental progress. Early Steps is already underfunded and overburdened.
- Eliminating funding for school-age children (6-12) served through the low-income working poor category. These children are unable to stay home alone safely and may become a danger to themselves and engage in risky behaviors, which could impact the child welfare (if parents are reported as negligent) and juvenile justice systems.
- Drastically reducing quality improvement efforts, including grants, training, and resource rooms.
- Eliminating community flexibility to design programs that meet local needs.
- Reducing support services for parents, including parent education and referrals for additional services.

### *Specific bill action:*

On Tuesday, the House Business and Consumer Affairs Subcommittee held a workshop on Early Learning programs focused on an [early learning PCB](#). The draft bill is a complete rewrite of the School Readiness Act with negative implications for educational standards for children. A revised bill based on testimony and invited written comment will be presented again next Tuesday for a vote in that committee. The original bill removes all quality and educational criteria from the early learning process; removes screening, assessment and curricula from the program; and substantially reduces the role of the Early Learning Coalitions (ELCs). These measures would have substantial repercussions for early learning.

[HB 5103](#) was filed this week by Rep. Marti Coley (R-Marianna) in the PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee. This bill directly impacts the state's School Readiness program by revising the number of existing ELCs from 31 to 25, and the minimum number of children that each coalition must serve; deletes provisions for establishment of payment rates; revises eligibility criteria for enrollment of children; revises priorities by which children are enrolled; limits expenditures for administrative activities, quality activities, and nondirect services; and provides for payment of school readiness providers according to calculations of payment rates. The PreK-12 Appropriations Subcommittee

passed HB 5103 by an 11-0 margin, and it will now appear in the Appropriations Committee next Wednesday.

Another bill filed this week, [HB 7055](#) by Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-Ft. Walton Beach), amends current statute and limits the Office of Early Learning's (OEL) rulemaking authority over school readiness programs and early learning coalitions, repeals OEL's rulemaking authority over prevailing market rate schedule, and repeals OEL's rulemaking authority related to the Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (TEACH) scholarship program.

**TAKE ACTION:** Revised bills are expected shortly based on testimony and input provided this week. However, there is no guarantee that any/all issues will be addressed. Please contact your Representatives, particularly those on the House Business and Consumer Affairs Subcommittee and Appropriations Committee which will be hearing these bills next Tuesday and Wednesday immediately, and let them know how important a quality school readiness program for Florida's children is to you.

## BUDGET

With House allocations out since last Thursday, Senate President Mike Haridopolos (R-Merritt Island) said his chamber won't release its budget allocations for another two weeks as leaders try to gather more information on budget and revenue issues, especially in the area of social services. Gov. Rick Scott has called for \$1 billion more in education funding; a price tag that will likely have to come from health care and social services, the state's other major funding area. President Haridopolos will rely on his Budget Subcommittee on Health and Human Services Appropriations Chair Joe Negron (R-Stuart) to see what can be moved from health and human services.

In the meantime, this week proved very busy for House Representatives addressing the state's budget. The House is beginning to analyze reductions to the health budget. The House released an initial health and human services budget proposal Tuesday that would drastically reduce hospital Medicaid rates by \$291 million next year, and trim a series of benefits for low-income Floridians. However, the proposal also would take steps such as increasing funding for child-protection investigators, stabilizing the finances of the deficit-plagued Agency for Persons with Disabilities and shielding the Medically Needy program for people with debilitating illnesses from cuts. The House's overall proposal totals slightly less than the \$30 billion. Some of the most notable decisions approved by the House Health Care Appropriations Subcommittee include:

- Restoration of \$214 for Child Protection Team (CPT) medical director salaries
- Additional funding for the state's Early Steps program at \$4.9 million
- Restoration of the Healthy Families non-recurring budget for \$2 million
- Restoration of Children's substance abuse for \$6.9 million
- Restoration of Children's mental health for \$3.5 million
- Increase of funding for the KidCare program providing more than 11,600 additional slots (4 percent increase) for eligible children
- Funding for 20 new Child Protective positions within the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and \$9.8 million for increases in investigators' salaries
- Expansion of newborn screening for congenital heart disease for \$1.9 million
- Elimination of CMS Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder for \$280,000
- Reductions in the Road to Independence program for youth aging out of foster care - from age 23 to age 21 (\$11.6 million),
- Level funding for Healthy Start
- Elimination of funding for the federal Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visitation (MIECHV) program that was reluctantly approved in order for the state to submit its Race to the Top Early Childhood application, which was not funded by the federal government

## STATE & LOCAL REVENUES

## *Local Government/Property Taxes*

The Senate continued deliberations on property tax reform proposals sponsored by Sen. David Simmons (R-Orange). The Budget Subcommittee on Finance and Tax held a workshop on [CS/SJR 314](#) and [CS/SJR 312](#) with no votes taken on Wednesday. CS/SJR 314 would prohibit increases in the assessed value of homestead and certain non-homestead property if the just value of the property decreases. The proposal also reduces the limitation on annual assessment increases for non-homestead from 10 percent to 7 percent. Finally, the constitutional amendment creates an additional homestead exemption. CS/SJR 312 rescinds and withdraws HJR 381 passed during the 2011 Legislative Session. It is expected the bills will come back for committee consideration. To date, no action has been taken in the Florida House.

On Thursday, the Senate Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security Committee took up [SJR 1056](#)

and its implementing bill [SB 1058](#) by Sen. Jim Norman (R-Hillsborough), which passed by an 8-0 margin. The constitutional proposal allows the Legislature to provide ad valorem tax relief to the surviving spouse of a veteran who died from service-connected causes while on active duty as a member of the United States Armed Forces and to the surviving spouse of a first responder who died in the line of duty. The amount of tax relief, to be defined by general law, can equal the total amount or a portion of the ad valorem tax otherwise owed on homestead property.

## **HEALTHY CHILDREN**

### *KidCare*

[SB 510](#) by Sen. Nan Rich (D-Weston), which allows the children of state employees to be eligible for the KidCare health insurance program, passed the Budget Subcommittee on Health and Human Services on Wednesday by a 7-0 margin. The bill will now be sent to the Budget Committee.

## **CHILD WELFARE**

### *Related to Foster Care*

This week, a House panel voted to reduce eligibility in the Road to Independence program from age 23 to 21. Less than two weeks after the Senate voted unanimously to make changes to the transition program through passage of [SB 434](#) by Sen. Nan Rich (D-Weston), the House Health Care Appropriations Subcommittee voted Tuesday to reduce the eligibility cap to age 21, a move backers say will save the state more than \$11 million. The vote in favor of the conforming bill was 9-5. This bill impacts 657 of about 19,000 children and youth in the state system. Opponents were clear that the bill set children and youth up to be failed by their parents and by state care.

The House companion bill, [HB 417](#) by Rep. Rich Glorioso (R-Plant City) still faces four committee stops and has yet to be heard in the first (Health and Human Services Access Subcommittee).

**TAKE ACTION:** Please contact [Speaker Cannon](#) and ask him to allow this important bill to be heard as soon as possible. Click [here](#) for additional contact information for Speaker Cannon.

### *Child Abuse*

[HB 1285](#) by Rep. Elaine Schwartz (D-Hollywood) relating to Criminal Conduct for Child Abuse passed its first committee by a 14-0 margin in the Criminal Justice Subcommittee Chaired. This bill requires that persons acting as expert witness have certain credentials.

### *Sexual Exploitation*

[SB 202](#) by Sen. Anitere Flores (R-Miami) relating to Sexual Exploitation passed out of the Budget Subcommittee on Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations on Wednesday and is now in the Budget Committee awaiting a hearing. Discussion became very controversial on Wednesday, and there will likely be further substantial changes to this bill.

## JUVENILE JUSTICE

### *Zero Tolerance for Crime and Victimization in Schools*

[SB 1886](#) filed by Sen. Stephen Wise (R-Jacksonville), requires that each district school board adopt a policy for reporting to a law enforcement agency acts that pose a serious threat to school safety; requires that acts that do not pose a serious threat to school safety be handled within the school's disciplinary system; requires that a child accused of a misdemeanor offense not be arrested and formally processed in the juvenile justice system; and requires that minor incidents be diverted from the juvenile justice system or handled within the school system's disciplinary system. The bill is set to be heard in the Senate Education Pre-K-12 Committee this coming Monday. The House companion, [HB 1445](#) is sponsored by Rep. Daniel Davis (R-Jacksonville) along with Rep. John Patrick Julien (D-Miami).

### *Juvenile Justice Education*

The House Criminal Justice Subcommittee adopted a strike-all version of [HB 949](#) Juvenile Justice Education and Workforce Programs sponsored by Rep. Baxley (R-Ocala). The strike-all amendment makes the bill identical to CS/SB 843 by Sen. Wise (R-Jacksonville). The bill substantially rewrites s. 985.618, F.S., relating to Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) education and workforce-related programs, to require DJJ to verify that each juvenile justice education program, at a minimum, uses virtual courses and virtual counseling, provides instruction from credentialed individuals during specified time periods, and expends funds in a manner that directly supports the attainment of successful student outcomes and that allows youth to engage in real work situations whenever possible.

The impetus for the bill was to ensure that youth in DJJ programs are able to acquire education and skills that allow them to attain gainful employment. Further, the sponsors of the bill are concerned that youthful infractions create a record that limits the employment options of youth and follow s them throughout adulthood.

Concerns were raised by the Florida Juvenile Justice Association (FJJA) regarding definitions that take into consideration residential versus non-residential programs, and differences in statewide programs with multiple school districts that have varying levels of funding and programmatic services. In addition, the FJJA wants to preserve the ability of providers to hire their own staff.

The House bill has three more committee stops, including the Appropriations Committee. The Senate bill began as a proposed committee bill in the PreK-12 Education Committee where it passed and is now in the Criminal Justice Committee.

### *Budget*

The House Criminal Justice Appropriations Committee released its budget proposal on Wednesday:

Reduce Redirections program	<i>Reduces MST, and FFT services statewide</i>	\$936K - 10%
Reduce non-delinquency rehab services	<i>diversion, sex offender &amp; day treatment Could Impact: White, BAYS, AMIkids, Daniel Memorial, Crosswinds, Orange County, Seminole County Sheriffs, Gulf Coast Treatment Center, G4S, Pasco County Sheriffs, Miami Dade Juvenile Svs</i>	\$1.8M - 10%
Reduce PACE services	<i>Impacts centers statewide</i>	\$766K - 10%
Reduce CINSFINS services	<i>Impacts programs statewide</i>	\$1.9M - 10%
Eliminate legislative	<i>Impacts: HBI, GAP, Operation</i>	\$2.055M

initiatives	<i>PAR, New Horizons Intervention Services , Community Coalition</i>	
Reduce non- secure residential ( <i>vacant beds</i> )	<i>Eliminates vacant low/moderate risk beds</i>	\$11.8M - 288 beds
Reduce wilderness therapeutic residential services	<i>Impacts Eckerd Youth Alternatives</i>	\$1.48M - 45 beds
Reduce secure detention for domestic violence youth	<i>reduces costs paid by counties Require conforming bill PCB- JUAS-12-01</i>	\$3.2M
Reduce detention cost share for fiscally restrained counties	<i>For counties who no longer use the state operated detention centers only</i>	\$748K
<i>Total reduction</i>		<i>\$22 million-4.2%</i>
<b>PROPOSED HOUSE ADDITIONS TO DJJ</b>		
Boys and Girls Club	<i>Construct new facility in Pasco County</i>	\$1M
Respite care for youth charged w/ domestic violence	<i>Require conforming bill PCB- JUAS-12-01</i>	\$1.17M
Capital Outlay -"Here's Help" residential facility	<i>Provides funding to fix facility</i>	\$200K
Capital Outlay-state owned	<i>Provides funding to fix state owned buildings</i>	\$187K
Proposed DJJ budget		\$506,392,727
Current Year Budget		\$528,744,30

## OTHER STATE NEWS

### *Children's Week*

The 17th annual [Children's Week](#) event will be held in Tallahassee at the capitol next week. This is the only broad-based promotion of children and family issues in the state, and brings together more than 100 different non-profit, corporate, philanthropic, faith-based, state agencies and organizations.