

# FAMILY & POLICY



AN ADVOCACY PROGRAM OF

MARCH 5, 2010

## Appropriations subcommittee members worked this week behind the scenes on the 2011 budget.

Lawmakers struggled to find ways to close the billion dollar gap between needs and revenues. Proposals for higher college tuition and deeper cuts to the university system that surfaced in committee meetings brought immediate protest and a promise from Gov. Perdue that they would not occur. Legislators are looking for cuts in other areas as well and are considering increasing state fees, some of which have remained the same for decades and do not cover costs.

Individuals and businesses could pay more for inspections, professional licenses, and other services. During the coming week officials will learn how February revenue collections compare to a year ago so they will have a better view of the state's fiscal picture.

## Tobacco tax advocates have ramped up the campaign.

This week they released results of a new poll showing wide support for a \$1 per pack increase that could produce \$300-\$400 M to help with the budget shortfall. Teen smoking has been shown to decline as the tax increases, so many people support it on that ground alone. Advocates are holding a rally on Monday, March 8<sup>th</sup> beginning at 9:00 a.m. at Central Presbyterian Church across from the Capitol. They will greet legislators, hold a press conference at 10:30 a.m. in Room 450 at the Capitol, and then resume meetings with legislators from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Press conferences are also scheduled at sites around the state. Additional House members from both parties have signed [HB 39](#) (Stephens, 164<sup>th</sup>), the tobacco tax legislation introduced in 2009.

## Consumer-friendly health insurance bills await action.

[HB 1268](#) (Knox, 24<sup>th</sup>) will let Georgians laid off by small firms take advantage of a new extension of a 65% federal subsidy for their COBRA health insurance premiums for up to 15 months. Last year, federal law provided for 9 months of subsidy for people who lost their jobs between

September 2008 and December 2009. It applied automatically to firms of 20 or more, but because states regulate continuation coverage for small employers, Georgia enacted SB 94 in 2009 to allow workers laid off by small firms to receive the subsidy for 9 months.

(Georgia law normally only requires 3 months of coverage instead of the 18 months that larger firms must offer.)

Congress has now extended the subsidy to 15 months and allows people laid off through February 2010 to receive it. The legislature must pass HB 1268 to conform or Georgia families will miss out.

[SB 330](#) (Smith, 52<sup>nd</sup>) has three main features: It prohibits policies with annual or lifetime limits, it allows dependent children under age 26 to continue on their parents' policies whether or not they are students, and it prohibits insurers from cancelling a policy or denying a claim due to a policy holder's misstatements or omissions unless they are directly related to the condition that produced the claim. [SB 443](#) (Smith, 52<sup>nd</sup>) seeks to deal with complaints about Medicaid care management organizations (CMOs) by creating a legislative oversight committee.

## Child welfare bills are under discussion next week. [SB](#)

[292](#) (Hamrick, 30<sup>th</sup>), rewriting the juvenile code to improve the way courts and other systems interact with children, will be discussed in a Senate Judiciary subcommittee on Tuesday, March 9<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 p.m. in Room 125 of the Capitol. Presentations and public testimony will center on Article 4 (termination of parental rights) and Article 5 (independent living services). A substitute to [SB 304](#) (Unterman, 45<sup>th</sup>) on commercial sexual exploitation of children will be offered in Senate Judiciary on Monday, March 8<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 p.m. in Room 307 CLOB. The new language seeks to address opponents' concerns. Instead of amending the law on prostitution, the substitute charts a path for child sex trafficking victims through the juvenile court system, making them eligible for entry into appropriate treatment.

## Highlights

- The General Assembly will meet for the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the 40-day session on Monday, March 8<sup>th</sup>.
- Work continues on the budget, but it may not be resolved for some time.

## You can help!

Locate your State Representative and Senator: [www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org) (Check your driver's license for 9-digit zip code.)

This news bulletin is prepared for Family & Policy by Linda Smith Lowe and Mary Frances Williams.

If you have questions: [smithlowe@earthlink.net](mailto:smithlowe@earthlink.net) (404-274-1746) or [mfwilliams@speakeasy.net](mailto:mfwilliams@speakeasy.net) (404-395-3485)