

FAMILY & POLICY



AN ADVOCACY PROGRAM OF

APRIL 3, 2009

The General Assembly adjourned *sine die* at midnight on Friday, April 3rd. As usual, much legislation, including the budget for the next fiscal year, was left to the last couple of days. This is a preliminary report on the outcome. It takes several days for final versions of bills reflecting all amendments to be posted. Also, further analysis of the budget may add detail on how funds were shifted. Bills that did not pass this year could still pass in 2010.

SFY 2010 Budget. Federal stimulus funds kept the FY 2010 Budget from being worse than it is. While cutting agencies deeply, it restores funding for school nurses and adds back funds for health department grant-in-aid and family planning services. It eliminates cuts in Medicaid and PeachCare rates paid to hospitals, doctors, and other providers, funds expected roll growth, and authorizes the Dept. of Community Health to seek a federal waiver to offer family planning services to women with incomes below 200% of the poverty level who do not otherwise qualify for Medicaid. The budget funds 3,000 new pre-K slots, uses stimulus funds to help serve more of the waiting list for the Childcare and Parent Services program, and provides \$991,680 for services to child victims of prostitution. It restores money for 135 MR Waiver slots and uses stimulus funds to restore cuts in Meals on Wheels and congregate meals for at-risk elderly. It reduces by half the cuts to respite care and Alzheimer's services. See the link to the budget for more.

Revenues. Gov. Perdue projects a deficit of at least \$500 M for FY 2011, and expiring federal stimulus funds will mean a shortfall of at least \$1.3 B in FY 2012. Yet, on the 40th day, legislators passed HB 481 (Graves, 12th). Analysts say its tax credit for hiring unemployed workers will cost taxpayers \$265,000 per new job because most of the hiring would occur without the tax break. Legislators added a capital gains tax cut that helps only 1% of the bottom 80% of earners. SB 206 (Goggans, 7th) creating more budget and tax transparency remains in the House.

While issues like transportation, the trauma system, and foreclosures got short shrift, a number of bills passed in the final flurry of activity. (The links to bills may not yet reflect the final versions.) HB 228 (Butler, 18th) reorganizing DHR functions effective July 1 creates a new Dept. of Behavioral Health and Developmental

Disabilities. Aging and DFCS will remain in the newly-named Dept. of Human Services. The Dept. of Community Health acquires much of the DHR Office of Regulatory Services and the Division of Public Health (DPH). The DPH Director will be

appointed by the Governor and will report to him and to the DCH Commissioner. The DPH will have a 9-member advisory council. An appointed commission will study whether DPH should be placed elsewhere. HB 228 also makes permanent the Commission on Family Violence. HB 581 (Coan, 101st) allows unemployment insurance (UI) for jobseekers looking for part time work and for certain workers retraining for growth industries, and it allows workers to receive federally funded UI for 13 extra weeks. A substitute to SB 94 (Hill, 32nd) enables people laid off by small firms to continue their employer-based health insurance for themselves and their families for 9 months with federal stimulus funds paying 65% of the premium. Without the bill, these families would have received the subsidy for only 3 months. HB 160 (Cole, 125th), fining "super-speeders" is expected to generate \$23 M for trauma care. SB 165 (Goggans, 7th) allows DCH to verify Medicaid and PeachCare applicants' income through the Dept. of Revenue. HB 254 (Peake, 137th) allows DFCS 30 instead of 90 days to identify adult relatives of children removed from their homes. HB 123 (Ramsey, 72nd) defines child molestation to include transmitting indecent images by cell phone or internet. HB 193 (Graves, 12th) allows an hourly equivalent of 180 school days and adds a Veterans Day holiday. HB 145 (Lindsey, 54th) makes certain changes in child support.

Highlights

In *sine die*'n Friday night, the General Assembly left mixed results.

Action needed! You can help!

Keep in touch with your State Representative and Senator: www.votesmart.org (Check your driver's license for 9-digit zip code.)

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