



Georgia Legislative Update
Highlights from the Week of March 28th, 2008

The Care of a Grandchild Act, [SB 88](#), passed Friday, 163-1 in the House and now heads to the Governor. This Act recognizes the increasing number of grandparents caring for their grandchildren due to family hardships and provides a simple mechanism for the granting power of attorney to a grandparent without the cost and time of a court proceeding. A modest financial subsidy for grandparents with limited means was stripped from the bill prior to passage.

[SR 445](#) creating a Joint House and Senate Commission on the problem of commercial and sexual exploitation of children in Georgia remains in House Rules Committee. Study committee resolutions will be taken up by the House for consideration on the Legislative Day 40.

Children's Mental Health

[SR 1187](#) was introduced this week in the Senate by Senator Don Thomas and immediately referred to Senate Rules. This would create a Senate Study Committee to look at Children's Mental Health in Georgia. [HR 1746](#) creates a House only study committee along the same lines.

Health Reform

Opposition to [HB 977](#) grows by the day. It would provide 146 million dollars in tax exemptions for private insurance companies that sell high-deductible health plans with a minimum \$2,200 deductible per year out of pocket for a family. HB 977 passed out of the Senate Finance Committee Thursday. Friday it was sent to the Committee on Government Oversight by the Senate Rules Committee. HB 977 has been attached to several other moving bills including [HB 1328](#) on the Senate floor and [HB 670](#), an income tax credit for wood residuals, in the Senate Finance Committee.

Staffing up Georgia's charity care network is the goal of the reforms contained in [HB 1222](#). The Health Share Volunteers in Medicine Act passed the Senate Thursday. This bill requires all medical personnel volunteering in non-profit clinics serving the low-income have a license in good standing and not be under professional sanction. The Senate substitute expands the definition of healthcare provider to include speech-language pathologists and audiologists, optometrists, professional counselors, social workers, licensed marriage and family therapists, occupational therapists, psychologists, dieticians and pharmacists. Under the bill dentists and physicians can only qualify for a special volunteer license to practice if they have no sanctions or disciplinary actions on their board license. The House agreed to the Senate substitute on Friday.

2009 BUDGET UPDATE

Friday the Senate passed the 2009 budget ([HB 990](#)). Senate changes worth noting included:

- **\$560,000** Senate add for a Regional Assessment Center to serve prostituted adolescents
- **\$17.2 M** Senate add to increase funds for subsidized childcare (4,700 new slots)
- **\$1.3 M** Senate add to increase funds for approved family violence shelters
- **\$635,000** Senate add to increase funds for rape crisis centers
- **\$2.5 M** Senate add for the Georgia Health Marketplace
- **\$1,648,450** Senate increased Independent Care Waiver Program personal support rate from 2.5% to 5%
- **\$4.36 M** Senate doubled the number of Independent Care Waiver Slots to address the community waiting list from the House position of 50 to 100
- **\$6.9 M** eliminated the House funding for tobacco cessation meds to all Medicaid consumers interested in quitting
- **\$300,000** eliminated the House funding for a new, specially equipped bus to perform sickle cell anemia testing throughout the state

The Senate supported the following House positions:

- **\$3 M** to expand Medicaid for Foster Care children up to the age of 21
- **\$989,001** to cover digital mammography services to Medicaid consumers
- **\$5 M** to increase reimbursement rates for maternity deliveries (from the Governor's 2.5% increase to 5%) in the Medicaid and PeachCare programs. Nearly 60% of the births in Georgia are publicly funded deliveries
- **\$28.9 M** increase Medicaid provider reimbursement rates
- **\$43.6 M** increase cost reimbursement for inpatient services at Levels I-III trauma hospitals and a smaller increase for non-trauma hospitals
- **\$7.3M** increase in cost reimbursement for outpatient services at Levels I-III trauma hospitals however instead of paying 100% of cost the House recommends increasing the percentage of costs covered by 5% and also wants to raise it slightly at non-critical access hospitals. Triage fees for non-emergency use of the Emergency Room go up from \$50 to \$60
- **\$3.6 M** to increase Dental reimbursement rates by 2.5%
- **\$726,798** to provide for a 1% operations increase for public and private pre-k providers
- **\$2.3 M** to ensure continued protection and care is provided for elderly victims of abuse and neglect (the Governor's original funding recommendation jeopardized approximately 150 elder abuse case manager positions)
- **\$1 M** to replace decreased federal funding providing 214,285 through the Meals on Wheels and congregate nutrition sites for at-risk seniors

The Budget Conference Committee began meeting Sunday to reconcile differences in the Senate and House versions of the budget.

Drawing to a Close

The General Assembly has scheduled Day 40. The final day of the 2008 session will be this Friday, the fourth of April.