



**Georgia Legislative Update**  
Highlights from the Week of April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008

**Sine Die Without a Tax Cut Plan**

Midnight brought the end of a contentious and largely unproductive session. While many good bills failed to pass, there is always a silver lining. Senate and House negotiators never reached agreement on several of the most dangerous legislative proposals such as Lt. Governor Cagle's 10% income tax cut or what was left of the Speaker's GREAT Plan to eliminate car taxes and freeze property assessments. [SR 20](#) which evolved from TABOR into Rep. Graves' proposal to curtail the use of revenue surpluses also did not pass.

**BUDGET**

A number of programs benefiting women and their families fared well in the 2009 final budget. Advocates are especially thrilled about the \$20.3 million increase in childcare! Another WPG priority, the Regional Assessment Center serving prostituted adolescent girls, received more than a half million dollars and a raise in reimbursement rates for Medicaid and PeachCare provider networks should help improve access to care. Here's a short list of funding items approved by the General Assembly on the 40<sup>th</sup> Day as part of HB 990:

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| <b>\$20.3 M</b>  | Increase to subsidized childcare and aftercare (5,638 new slots) for low-income parents entering the workforce (through TANF)  |
| <b>\$815,000</b> | Increase for approved family violence shelters- a cut from the \$1.3M Senate position  |
| <b>\$635,000</b> | Increase for rape crisis centers   |
| <b>\$560,000</b> | New state dollars for a Regional Assessment Center serving prostituted adolescents   |
| <b>\$3 M</b>     | Expansion of Medicaid for Foster Care children up to the age of 21   |
| <b>\$989,000</b> | Recommendation to provide coverage for digital mammography services to Medicaid consumers  |
| <b>\$5 M</b>     | Increase reimbursement rate for maternity deliveries by 5% in the Medicaid and PeachCare programs. <i>Nearly 60% of the births in Georgia are publicly funded deliveries</i> |
| <b>\$28.9 M</b>  | Increase Medicaid provider reimbursement rates.  |
| <b>\$43.6 M</b>  | Increase cost reimbursement for inpatient services at Levels I-III trauma hospitals and a smaller increase for non-trauma hospitals  |

<b>\$18.85 M</b>	House recommends the increase in cost reimbursement for outpatient services at Levels I-III trauma hospitals but percentages vary slightly also raised it slightly at non-critical access hospitals. Triage fees for non-emergency use of the Emergency Room go up from \$50 to \$60
<b>\$3.6 M</b>	Increase Dental reimbursement rates by 2.5%
<b>\$3.27 M</b>	Restoration of 75 Independent Care Waiver Slots to address the community waiting list
<b>\$990,000</b>	Increase Independent Care Waiver Program personal support rate 3%
<b>\$726,798</b>	1% operations increase for public and private pre-k providers
<b>\$4.1 M</b>	To maintain staff necessary to ensure continued protection and care is provided for elderly victims of abuse and neglect
<b>\$1 M</b>	To replace decreased federal funding providing 214,285 through the Meals on Wheels and congregate nutrition sites for at-risk seniors
<b>\$300,000</b>	For a new, specially equipped bus to perform sickle cell anemia testing statewide

Disappointingly, the final budget did not include funding for tobacco cessation therapy for Medicaid consumers. It did however chip in \$50 M to reduce the education austerity cuts by approximately a third. For more view the [2009 Final Budget Conference Report](#).

### **Health Reform in the Final Analysis**

Two of the four big ideas floated to tackle Georgia's health care woes made it as far as the Governor's desk:

- [HB 977](#) the Governor's plan offering insurance companies major tax credits on high deductible health premiums collected to new accountability measures. It passed despite consumer health advocates vocalizing concerns that it actually does very little to improve affordability of health care and may well hinder access for low income families. The bills provides Insurance companies selling high-deductible health plans with a minimum \$2,200 deductible per year out of pocket for a family will benefit to the tune of \$146 million in tax exemptions over the next five years.
- [HB 1234](#) sponsored by Rep. Mickey Channell addressing the problems with Georgia's Medicaid Care Management Organizations passed. It holds the CMOs to new requirements that should improve the delivery of care to individuals. Among other things it requires coverage for newborn infants until discharged from the hospital.
- [SB 404](#) the Lt. Governor's initiative to create a state sponsored web portal known as the Georgia Health Marketplace did not pass the House. It would use taxpayer dollars to market and sell high deductible health plans covering catastrophic care only alongside PeachCare and other high value, comprehensive coverage plans.
- [SB 395](#) the Lt. Governor's initiative to fund a network of new Emergency Room diversion clinics also did not pass the House. Note: [HB 1222](#), a companion piece of

legislation licensing retired and out of state practitioners to offer free care to eligible low income individuals did pass.

### **Other Good Measures that Passed in the Final Days**

[HB 535](#) creates the Office of Disability Services Ombudsman and a medical review group to conduct medical reviews of all deaths of consumers in state hospitals or state operated community residential services. [HB 1277](#) provides charter school employees with health insurance. [SB 507](#) streamlines bureaucracy for children who need ongoing Medicaid therapy services for disabilities. [SR 1187](#) and [HR 1746](#) create Study Committees to look at Children's Mental Health in Georgia. [SR 445](#) creates a Joint House and Senate Commission on the problem of commercial and sexual exploitation of children.

### **Ongoing Issues to Watch**

*Trauma care:* while \$62 M was added to the 2009 budget to up reimbursement rates to trauma facilities, the search for a dedicated revenue stream to cover this need fell short again this year.

*School vouchers:* [SB 458](#) expanding private school vouchers died in the House, however [HB 1133](#) which is another way to direct state money away from public K-12 education passed. It provides thousands of dollars in tax credits to incentivize donations to organizations giving private school scholarships.

*Family values at work:* remember [HB 901](#)? While states like New Jersey and Washington enact paid family leave Georgia legislators leave work/family balance issues to die in subcommittee.

*Gun violence:* [HB 89](#) emerged from Conference Committee with dangerous new provisions expanding where concealed firearms can be carried to include bars that serve alcohol and on public transit. Public outcry may yet persuade the Governor to veto this bill.

### **In Closing**

Congratulations to those of you who engaged *your* elected officials on *your* issues this session. Effective advocacy is a year round project. We hope you will join us for the WPG Annual Legislative Wrap up in mid-May. WPG will share more details on location and invited legislator panelists as they become available.