

Legislative Link

A legislative update provided by the United Way of Florida, Inc.

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THE PERFECT FISCAL STORM?

The last several months - and the prospect of the future - have left those concerned with health and human services in the State of Florida reeling as a cascade of events have signaled a continuing trend toward significantly increased need and fewer resources to address them.

- During the 2007 session, the Florida Legislature reduced property taxes by more than \$12 billion.
- Last October the Legislature cut \$1.1 billion out of this year's budget.
- In late January, Florida voters approved an additional \$9.3 billion in property tax cuts.
- The Florida Legislature is poised to cut about \$500 million out of this year's budget.
- The Legislature will need to cut an additional \$2+ billion out of next year's budget before the end of session.
- The Legislature and the Taxation and Budget Reform Commission appear to have an appetite for placing a cap on local government revenues.
- The Florida economy remains in the doldrums and appears set to stay there for the foreseeable future.

What does all this mean? ...requests for basic assistance (utilities, rent, food) are up between 50% and 100% across the state. Food pantries are facing shortages. Calls for other human services are escalating.

The irony of difficult economic times is that resources become more and more scarce at exactly the time they are needed. This is particularly true in Florida, which relies heavily on sales taxes: when the economy is tight, people buy less.

Governor Crist has proposed a 2008-2009 budget that would spare much of the pain that could be wrought by \$2 billion in cuts to state services. However, because he accomplishes this by raiding reserves, increasing gambling revenues, and sweeping dollars out of trust funds into general revenue, among others, the Legislature has reacted unfavorably toward it. Which means we will likely see deep cuts being made to next year's budget over the next eight weeks.

This year's session will be dominated by budget issues. It remains to be seen how cuts that are made - and those resulting from activities bulleted above - will impact health and human services across the state.

Time will tell.

Welcome to Your First 2008 Legislative Link!

As always, your *Legislative Link* will keep you up to date on legislative activities relating to human service and other issues of interest to United Ways, United Way agencies, and United Way supporters. It will be published weekly during the 2008 Legislative Session; in your email each Friday afternoon, highlighting legislative activity during the week.

During the course of the session, if you have any questions or comments regarding the *Legislative Link* or any issues it addresses - or should address - please don't hesitate to contact the United Way of Florida. Have a great session!

IMPORTANT LEGISLATIVE DATES

March 4, 2008

Regular Session Convenes & Deadline for filing bills for introduction

April 22, 2008

50th day – last day for regularly scheduled committee meetings

April 28, 2008

All bills are immediately certified

May 2, 2008

60th day – last day of Regular Session

The IRS Could Be Looking for You!

The Internal Revenue Service is looking for more than 115,000 taxpayers who are due refund checks worth about \$110 million after the checks were returned as undeliverable.

The refund checks, averaging \$950, can be claimed as soon as taxpayers update their addresses with the IRS. Before you file your 2007 tax return, check ["Where's My Refund?"](#) on the IRS website.

TAXATION AND BUDGET REFORM COMMISSION

The Taxation and Budget Reform Commission is one of the most powerful entities in Florida. It has the power to insert constitutional amendments directly onto the ballot for consideration by the electorate. To go on the ballot, a Commission amendment must be passed by 17 of the 25 voting members, and must be finalized by early May, this year. Created by s. 6, Art. XI of the State Constitution:

"The commission shall examine the state budgetary process, the revenue needs and expenditure processes of the state, the appropriateness of the tax structure of the state, and governmental productivity and efficiency; review policy as it relates to the ability of state and local government to tax and adequately fund governmental operations and capital facilities required to meet the state's needs during the next twenty year period; determine methods favored by the citizens of the state to fund the needs of the state, including alternative methods for raising sufficient revenues for the needs of the state; determine measures that could be instituted to effectively gather funds from existing tax sources; examine constitutional limitations on taxation and expenditures at the state and local level; and review the state's comprehensive planning, budgeting and needs assessment processes to determine whether the resulting information adequately supports a strategic decision making process."

One of the many proposals being considered by the Commission is a requirement that businesses be required to collect sales taxes on goods they sell over the internet. More than 20 states have already signed the "Streamlined Sales Tax Agreement" that would harmonize state laws and make it easier for businesses to work from the same guidelines vis-à-vis internet sales tax collections. If lawmakers approved Florida's involvement with the agreement, the state would collect \$100 million or more in new taxes. To learn more about the Commission and current proposals it is considering, visit its website at <http://www.floridatbrc.org/>

BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON JUVENILE JUSTICE ISSUES REPORT

Last month, the Blue Ribbon Commission chaired by former Lt. Governor Frank Brogan issued its report for reforming Florida's Juvenile Justice system. The 25 member Commission made 52 specific recommendations that largely call on the state to spend more money up-front on prevention efforts to try to steer kids away from a life time of crime. The report also stresses better training and retention of detention officers and other workers assigned to guard and mentor teens, who quit at alarming rates.

The current system locks up many teens who are no threat to public safety while ignoring prevention programs. The report notes that the state spends \$27 million each year incarcerating teenage delinquents who have never committed a felony, a disproportionate number of whom are minorities; While only 21 percent of juveniles between ages 10 and 17 in Florida are black, 51 percent of those in 'residential' juvenile programs In addition, the state spends \$42,606 for each teen committed to a residential program, compared with \$2,128 per child in a prevention program. To view the entire report and its recommendations, go to <http://www.djj.state.fl.us/blueprint/>.

BOB HOPE CLASSICS.....

ON TURNING 70 "You still chase women, but only downhill".

ON TURNING 80 "This is the time of your life when even your birthday suit needs pressing."

ON TURNING 90 "You know you're getting old when the candles cost more than the cake."

ON TURNING 100 "I don't feel old. In fact I don't feel anything until noon, then it's time for my nap".

BILLS HEARD THIS WEEK

(Some information below is excerpted from legislative staff analysis)

SB 164 Insurance/Mental & Substance Related Disorders (Crist)

Mental and nervous disorders are commonplace in the population. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that an estimated 26.2 percent of Americans ages 18 and older suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in any given year. Approximately 6 million people suffer from what can be called a serious mental illness. Around 2.4 million American adults have schizophrenia, 5.7 million American adults have bipolar disorder, and 14.8 million American adults have major depressive disorder.

Mental and nervous disorders exact a high cost on individuals, families, and society as a whole. Mental illnesses are the leading cause of disability in the United States, Canada and Western Europe. The World Health Organization reported in 2002 that suicide causes more deaths worldwide each year than homicide or war. The financial cost of mental and nervous disorders is also large. In 2003, The President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health cited data indicating that in the United States, the annual economic, indirect cost of mental illnesses is estimated to be \$79 billion, with \$63 billion of that amount the result of lost productivity.

Senate Bill 164 significantly expands the benefits that insurers and health maintenance organizations (HMOs) are required to offer to group policyholders (e.g., employers) for mental and nervous disorders. The bill requires that the benefit limits for mental health (inpatient, partial hospitalization, and outpatient durational limits, dollar amounts, deductibles, and coinsurance) may not be more restrictive than the treatment limitations and cost-sharing requirements under the plan that are applicable to other diseases, illnesses, and medical conditions. The bill also specifies a broad list of mental health conditions that must be covered under this optional group coverage.

Last Action: 03/04/08 SENATE Favorable by Banking and Insurance; 10 Yeas, 1 Nay

HB 0731 Personal Care Attendant Program (Gardiner)

House Bill 731 amends the existing Personal Care Attendant (PCA) program and expands participant eligibility to provide personal care attendants to persons who have severe and chronic disabilities of all kinds. The bill names the program the "James Patrick Memorial Work Incentive Personal Attendant Services Program."

The bill merges the Cross Disability Pilot program that provides personal care attendants to the significantly disabled in Orange, Osceola, Lake and Seminole counties with the PCA program and specifies that all persons who are enrolled in the existing PCA and the Cross Disability pilot projects on June 30, 2008, are automatically eligible for and enrolled in the revised program.

The bill places the administration of the program within the Florida Association of Centers for Independent Living (FACIL) and provides that FACIL receive 15 percent of the funds that are deposited in the Florida Endowment Foundation for Vocational Rehabilitation from the Tax Collection Enforcement Diversion Program and the Motorcycle Specialty License Tab to administer the program.

The bill increases the allocation to the PCA program and redirects 90 percent of the sales tax collections obtained through the Tax Collection Enforcement Diversion program from the General Revenue Fund to the Able Trust as one source of funding for the expanded PCA program. The Revenue Estimating Conference analysis dated February 29, 2008, estimates the fiscal impact of the bill to be \$1M from the General Revenue.

Last Action: 03/05/08 HOUSE Now in Healthcare Council

Bills Heard this Week continued

HB 0739 Guardian Advocates for Persons with Developmental Disabilities (Ambler and others)

Some individuals with developmental disabilities may need assistance in handling their personal or financial affairs. A form of guardianship assistance called the guardian advocate is available to persons with developmental disabilities in accordance with section 393.12, F.S. A person for whom a guardian advocate has been appointed retains all legal rights except those which have been specifically granted to the guardian advocate. The guardian advocate is considered by some advocates for persons with developmental disabilities to be preferable to other forms of guardianship. Some of the reasons for this preference are that this process does not require the adjudication of incapacity of the individual and the associated cost of the examining committee for determining capacity of the individual.

House bill 739 provides substantive changes to section 393.12 and 393.13, F.S., relating to the appointment of guardian advocates for persons with developmental disabilities. The bill provides that: The court must appoint a guardian advocate from a list of persons in preferential order giving first preference to health care surrogates.

The name of the proposed individual to serve as guardian advocate is deleted from the required items in a petition for the appointment.

Guardian advocates are not required to be represented by counsel unless required by the court.

Court appointed attorneys for the person with a developmental disability are to come from the office of criminal conflict and civil regional counsel or private attorneys in accordance with s. 27.40, F.S.

Court appointed attorneys must complete specified training unless waived by the court.

Attorneys may not represent both the individual with a developmental disability and the guardian advocate.

The right of an individual with a developmental disability to consent to or refuse treatment is subject to the powers given to the guardian advocate or guardian.

Last Action: 03/05/08 HOUSE Now in Healthcare Council

SB 0788 Transportation Disadvantaged Services (Fasano)

The Transportation Disadvantaged (TD) Program, created in 1979 by the Legislature pursuant to Part I of ch. 427, F.S., coordinates a network of local and state programs providing transportation services for elderly, disabled, and low-income citizens. The Legislature created the Commission for the Transportation Disadvantaged (commission) in 1989 as an independent entity within the Department of Transportation (DOT). The mission of the commission is to ensure the availability of efficient, cost-effective and quality transportation services for transportation disadvantaged persons. The TD Program is administered through a decentralized network of state and local organizations. The commission is the state entity responsible for ensuring the coordination and delivery of TD services in a cost-effective manner throughout the state.

Senate Bill 788 revises ss. 427.011 – 427.016, F.S., to ensure the coordinated planning of transportation for all human service agencies; strengthen the alternative provider procedure process for state agencies to ensure all agencies follow the exact same process; require all state agencies to identify dollars spent on non-emergency transportation services to transportation disadvantaged clients; and require all state agencies to pay the approved transportation rates. This bill also updates terminology, deletes obsolete language, and makes other technical changes.

Last Action: 03/05/08 SENATE Now in Community Affairs

Bills Heard this Week continued

HB 0793 Transitional Services for Young Adults with Disabilities (Davis)

HB 793 creates the Health Care Transition Services Task Force for Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities within the Department of Health to address the transition of youth and young adults with disabilities from the pediatric to the adult health care system.

The bill also creates the Don Davis Health and Transition Services Program of Jacksonville in the Children's Medical Services Network within the Department of Health to assist youth and young adults who have special health care needs or who are developmentally disabled transition from the children's health care and educational system to the adult health care system and to employment. This program is authorized to serve persons age 14 to 26 who have chronic special health care needs or developmental disabilities and who reside in Baker, Clay, Duval, Nassau, and St. Johns Counties.

The bill appropriates \$650,000 recurring General Revenue to the Children's Medical Services Network within the Department of Health for operational and expansion costs. However, the cost to implement the provisions of the bill is indeterminate.

Last Action: 03/04/08 HOUSE Favorable with Amendments by Health Quality; 11 Yeas, 0 Nays; Now in Healthcare Council

HB 0917 Service Animals (Galvano and others)

The first systematic use of companion animals to assist individuals with disabilities was probably the training of dogs to assist people who are blind and visually impaired. The first guide dog in the United States was trained in 1929 at The Seeing Eye, Inc., in Morristown, New Jersey.¹ For many years The Seeing Eye was the only training school for guide dogs in this country, which is why it is not uncommon to hear guide dogs called "seeing eye dogs." Since the 1960's, the practice of using companion animals to increase the physical mobility and personal independence of individuals with disabilities has become more widespread.

The bill amends the definition of the term "service animal" to include any animal that is in the process of being trained or is being raised for the purpose of being trained at a future date to perform tasks for an individual with a disability. The bill also extends the same rights and privileges with respect to access to public facilities and the same liability for damage as is provided for an individual with a disability accompanied by a service animal to any volunteer who raises puppies for the purposes of future training as service animals if certain specified conditions are met.

Last Action: 03/05/08 HOUSE Now in Healthcare Council

UNITED WAY OF FLORIDA

2008 ISSUE PAPERS

FLORIDA PUBLIC EMPLOYEES' CHARITABLE CAMPAIGN

Removing Local Control and Authority

Legislation was filed for consideration by the 2007 Florida Legislature that would have created the Florida Public Employees' Charitable Campaign. The bills were filed by Senator Al Lawson and Representative Kelly Skidmore, and will likely be filed again in 2008. They would mandate that local public employers (e.g. school districts, county and municipal governments, police departments, sheriffs, water management districts, etc.) include in their annual employee charitable campaigns any federation - or member agencies of said federation - that complies with the bills' requirements. The United Way of Florida strongly opposes this legislation for the following reasons:

- **The legislation is not necessary.** - Local public employers are currently empowered to include any legitimate charity or federation they deem appropriate.
- **The needs of the local community - not the state - should determine which federations participate in a local employee campaign.** - Local public employers have designed their campaigns to address the unique needs of their communities and their workplaces. A state formula mandating participation by charitable organizations flies in the face of local control, authority, and determination, and undermines the ability of local communities to address their unique needs.
- **The bill is anti-competitive.** – Any federation or agency desiring to participate in a local charitable campaign should be required to show the local community it deserves to be in the campaign. This is what happens under current law. The legislation removes this element of competition and instead mandates participation by certain groups.
- **The bill will reduce funding for community health and human services.** – Most local public employee campaigns include United Way and other local charities. Employee contributions are made primarily to these local charities to address serious local problems. Passage of the bill will result in less money for the critically important services these charities provide because the bill does not require participating agencies to provide local services. (The bill requires only that participating agencies have an office “in this state” and document “available services”. Such services could include just a website or a billboard.)

The United Way of Florida urges policymakers at all levels to oppose legislation that removes control and authority from local public officials to determine which charities participate in their workplace campaigns.

For additional information, contact the United Way of Florida at (850)488-8276.

FLORIDA STATE EMPLOYEES' CHARITABLE CAMPAIGN

State government supporting its employees.

In 1993, the Florida State Employees' Charitable Campaign (FSECC) was placed into section 110.181, Florida Statutes. Pursuant to that law, the Florida Department of Management Services (DMS) provides staff support to the FSECC Steering Committee, which is comprised of state employees and charged with overseeing the Campaign. This support includes reviewing Campaign brochures and pledge cards, enforcing eligibility requirements, reviewing and recommending agencies for acceptance or rejection, ensuring participants are properly registered with appropriate state agencies, etc.

Before 1993, DMS funded this staff position. The 1993 statute, however, requires that if the Legislature does not fund the position, DMS must be reimbursed for it out of gross FSECC contributions, not to exceed one percent (about \$49,000) of the total campaign. From 1993-1997, DMS was reimbursed by FSECC fiscal agents about \$17,000 annually. Every year since 1993 – except 2003 – the Legislature has annually appropriated \$17,000 to fund the position, thereby negating the need to pay for it with state employee FSECC contributions. During the 2007 special session addressing budget shortfalls, the Legislature cut the \$17,000 from the DMS budget.

State employee contributions to the FSECC are intended to be used for charitable purposes, to help people in need. Instead, \$17,000 of those contributions could be used to offset the state's cost for conducting the Campaign - a cost that thousands of other large public and private employers absorb as a cost of supporting their employees and being good corporate citizens. This reduces the amount of money available to help people in need, and is contrary to the intent of state employees who contribute to the Campaign.

This minimal investment of \$17,000 yields more than \$4 million through the FSECC, reducing the need for at least that amount of state funding for hundreds of individual and family support services.

Because of the critical need for experienced staff, and recognizing the positive message state funding for the DMS staff position would be to state employees, the FSECC Steering Committee has voted to support this request for funding in the past.

The United Way of Florida urges the 2008 Florida Legislature to appropriate funds to provide staff support through the Department of Management Services for the Florida State Employees' Charitable Campaign.

For additional information, contact the United Way of Florida offices at (850) 488-8276.

FLORIDA STATE EMPLOYEES' CHARITABLE CAMPAIGN

State employees generously supporting their communities.

In 1993, the Florida State Employees' Charitable Campaign (FSECC) was placed into law (s. 110.181, F.S.). It clearly expresses the Legislature's intent that the FSECC be directed by the people for whom it is named and established – state employees themselves: It creates a nine member FSECC Steering Committee of state employees at the state level to oversee the Campaign and requires local steering committees of state employees “to assist in conducting the campaign and to direct the distribution of undesignated funds...”

“Undesignated funds” are donations that are not directed by the donor to go to a specific charity. FSECC pledge cards tell donors that their undesignated contributions will be distributed by their local state employees' steering committees.

A federation is an umbrella organization representing more than one charity participating in the FSECC. Federations act merely as “pass-throughs” for funds contributed to the charities in their networks, and often represent charities that provide minimal, if any, direct services within a given Florida community. They believe undesignated funds should be allocated by a statutory formula rather than by the local state employee steering committees.

This belief is contrary to express Legislative intent and would eliminate the most meaningful tool state employees have in operating and directing their campaign.

Creating an arbitrary, state-mandated formula to distribute undesignated funds discounts the tremendous leadership state employees bring to their campaign, ignores their ability to represent their colleagues by distributing the funds in ways that best accommodate the needs of their communities, and removes from their control one of their best tools for assuring that their colleagues' contributions have the most impact in their communities, where they live and work. It also assumes that a predetermined formula better reflects where donors would like their undesignated funds to go. In fact, the opposite is true. Since most local state employee campaign committees have historically allocated undesignated funds, the fact that state employees continue to make undesignated contributions indicates they fully support the actions of their peers on the local committees.

The FSECC was not created for the convenience of charities and federations, but rather for state employees and to lessen workplace disruption. To apply a formula to undesignated funds presumes that employees who choose not to designate don't know what they are doing and can't read the pledge card.

The United Way of Florida opposes limiting state employee oversight and control of the Florida State Employees' Charitable Campaign by, among others, changing the way undesignated funds are allocated.

The United Way of Florida urges the 2008 Florida Legislature to maintain state employee oversight of the FSECC.

For additional information, contact the United Way of Florida offices at (850) 488-8276

VOLUNTARY PREKINDERGARTEN IMPLEMENTATION

A model Quality Rating Improvement System would help parents and improve quality.

In November 2002, Florida voters overwhelmingly approved an amendment to the Florida Constitution requiring implementation of a high quality Voluntary Prekindergarten program (VPK) by the 2005 school year for all four year olds whose parents want them to participate. During a special session in December 2004, the Legislature passed legislation requiring implementation of the new VPK program in August 2005.

During the 2006-2007 school year, more than 124,000 four year olds (55% of all four year olds in the state) participated in the VPK program, more than anticipated.

Those involved with the VPK program are continually striving to improve its quality. One tool available for this purpose is a Quality Rating Improvement System.

According to the National Child Care Information Center, a Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS) is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and education programs. Similar to rating systems for restaurants and hotels, QRISs award quality ratings to early care and education programs that meet a set of defined program standards. All QRISs are composed of five common elements: standards; accountability measures; program and practitioner outreach and support; financing incentives; and parent/consumer education efforts.

As of November 2006, 14 states (Colorado, District of Columbia, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and Vermont) have a statewide QRIS.

A statewide QRIS Workgroup, staffed by the Agency for Workforce Innovation and comprised of a wide spectrum of providers, advocates, state agency representatives and others, has developed a QRIS model for Florida. It creates a 2-year voluntary pilot program to implement the QRIS in eight Florida areas: Miami-Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, Pinellas, Hillsborough, Duval, Orange, and the Big Bend. Child care providers would only participate if they want to, and it would create a five-star rating system, with each tier being represented by one to five stars. It is based upon assessment of a facility's learning environment: curricula, screening, and assessment; staff qualifications; professional development; business practices; and family involvement.

The QRIS Workgroup product will provide an opportunity for the state to experiment with a QRIS that could increase the quality of care and education for children, increase parents' understanding and demand for higher quality care, and increase professional development of child care providers.

The United Way of Florida urges the 2008 Florida Legislature to pass legislation incorporating the QRIS Workgroup recommendations.

For additional information, please contact the United Way of Florida at (850) 488-8276.

FLORIDA MEDICAID REFORM

Move forward after considering all available data.

Medicaid is a key healthcare safety net program for Florida's families. It provides vital healthcare services to nearly 2.3 Floridians – one in every eight Floridians - including more than one million children, more than 40% of the state's pregnancies, half of all AIDS patients, much of the state's blind and disabled population, and two-thirds of those in nursing homes.

The \$16 billion annual Medicaid budget consumes 16% of the state's general revenue, second only to public education. Medicaid's share of the state budget grew from 5.9% in 1980 to 24.4% in 2005. If this growth rate continues, Medicaid will consume 32.8% of the state budget in 2010. Even so, Florida has ranked in the bottom 10 states historically in its per capita expenditures for Medicaid.

Because Medicaid's projected costs are unsustainable, the 2005 Legislature decided to begin overhauling the program. Premised on the notion that fostering competition among private healthcare networks would save significant dollars – an estimated \$4.58 billion in federal and state funds during the first five years - the 2005 Florida Legislature authorized the Agency for Health Care Administration to seek a federal waiver authorizing the state to conduct two Medicaid reform pilot projects, one in Duval County and one in Broward County. These two counties account for approximately 15% of the state's Medicaid enrollees (10% in Broward and 5% in Duval). The key change in these pilot sites is a switch from a fee-for-service payment system to one where the state pays managed care organizations a predetermined, capped premium for each beneficiary.

Legislation is being drafted by the Agency for Healthcare Administration to expand the pilot sites in 2008, a year before existing law permits and a year before a comprehensive review of the pilot sites is concluded by the Legislature's research arm, the Office of Program Policy and Government Accountability.

There has been no analysis of whether or not Medicaid reform has resulted in cost savings. At the same time, significant concerns have been raised by Medicaid providers, beneficiaries and advocates regarding availability and access to services in the pilot areas. The only third-party evaluation that has been undertaken thus far has been conducted by Georgetown University, funded by the Jessie Ball DuPont Fund. In a series of three studies to date, Georgetown University researchers have, among others, found that:

- More than one-fourth of physicians participating in the old Medicaid indicated they would not participate in the pilot areas.
- 51% of doctors surveyed reported it is harder to provide medically necessary treatment to children in the pilot sites because of restrictions and requirements of the pilot program plans.
- Reform has made the Medicaid program more complex and difficult for beneficiaries to understand.
- Half of the HMOs in the pilot areas are limiting drug benefits.
- Beneficiaries report problems getting access to needed drugs.

The promise of Medicaid reform is improved services to beneficiaries at less cost to the state, but there has been no comprehensive evaluation of the program to bear this out or to show how implementation challenges can be effectively addressed as reform efforts are expanded. At the least, the Georgetown studies raise serious questions that must be addressed. The need for thorough evaluation to be conducted before expansion – particularly given the billions of dollars that are being spent and that could be saved – speaks for itself.

The United Way of Florida urges the 2008 Florida Legislature to conduct a comprehensive, third-party evaluation of Medicaid reform pilot projects before expanding reform efforts into new areas of the state.

For additional information, please contact the United Way of Florida at (850) 488-8276.

T.E.A.C.H.

Striving for quality in our School Readiness programs.

The Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (T.E.A.C.H.) program provides scholarships to child care workers/teachers to assist them improve their educational status so they are better prepared to address the developmental needs of the children in their care. Scholarships can be used only for training leading to credentials (CDA, CDAE, Director Credential) or an associate degree in early childhood or child development. T.E.A.C.H., the only state-level quality initiative for Florida's School Readiness programs, first received state funding in 1998. It is intended to improve the quality of care in numerous ways, to provide a "hand up" to teachers who earn on average only about \$7 an hour, and to reduce turnover.

While it is fundamentally a scholarship, at its heart T.E.A.C.H. is a three-way public-private partnership contract between the teacher, the center owner/director and the T.E.A.C.H. program, with each having certain responsibilities: The teacher "buys-in" to his/her professional development by paying 10% of the costs of books and tuition; the center owner/director commits to pay 20% of the costs and the T.E.A.C.H. program pays at least 70% plus a stipend for gasoline. The center owner/director commits to support the teacher by providing 3 hours of release time each week for the teacher to study, attend to family duties or attend class. Since participants in T.E.A.C.H. are typically non-traditional students, this is an important component in juggling the myriad of responsibilities. The teacher commits to stay employed at the center for a specified period of time after completion of the contract (usually one year) in exchange for the investment of the employer. Trained T.E.A.C.H. counselors commit to help teachers navigate educational options, mediate issues and potential conflicts, and offer encouragement and support to reach goals. Upon completion of the contract, the employer agrees to provide a raise or bonus for the teacher in recognition of accomplishment. The T.E.A.C.H. program also provides a bonus.

The program reduces turnover to 4-9%, in a field that generally experiences high turnover (30-40% national average annually). Teacher training and education is increased which is directly correlated to higher quality and better child outcomes. More than 98 percent of employers and participants report they are very satisfied with the program. As of February 2007, there were 4,140 child care practitioners receiving state-funded scholarships.

The Legislature appropriated \$3 million into T.E.A.C.H. during the 2007-2008 fiscal year. Due to the increased needs to meet capacity demands for VPK, a minimum of \$4 million is needed to sustain existing participants and enroll 200 more of those on the waiting list for 2008-2009.

The United Way of Florida urges the 2008 Florida Legislature to appropriate at least \$3 million to maintain the T.E.A.C.H. program in 2008-2009.

For additional information, please contact the United Way of Florida at (850) 488-8276.

FLORIDA 211 NETWORK

The state should play its indispensable role in this public/private partnership.

Background:

On July 21, 2000, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) designated the telephone number “211” as the abbreviated dialing code for access to community Information and Referral (I&R) services nationwide. 211 is an easy-to-remember and universally recognized number that makes a critical connection between individuals and families in need and community-based organizations and governmental agencies that can help them. “211” is the 911 telephone number for non-emergency human services and for crisis response information.

The 2002 Florida Legislature passed visionary legislation creating the Health and Human Service Access Act, recognizing 211 as an invaluable “front door” for simplifying and streamlining access to human service information, and charging the Agency for Health Care Administration with certifying 211 providers to assure quality and uniformity.

211 is available in 49 counties, representing 83% of Florida’s population (15.1 million people).

2007 Legislative Issue:

Florida Information and Referral (I&R) providers – who answer more than three million telephone inquiries about human services annually – have compiled information on thousands of human service programs across the state. Along with the 211 providers that link them together, they are making it easier for all Floridians to get the information they need to keep them out of emergency rooms, off of government assistance, out of “deep end” social service programs, safe from abuse, and in stable housing. They also help callers find job training and assistance, elder care and child care, and before-and-after-school care that will allow them to stay employed. During the 2004 and 2005 hurricanes, 211s provided critically needed support to many Emergency Operation Centers, and provided information to more than 100,000 Floridians in the days following the storms; a role that will be just as important during and following disasters in future years.

Based on a study by the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability, Florida’s state agencies annually spend more than \$20 million, and state employees expend more than 1,000,000 hours providing I&R services. Yet, there is no I&R “system”; virtually all of these autonomous I&Rs act in isolation from one another, with no way to share information or act in a coordinated manner that will result in more efficient and effective expenditure of state resources. Implementation of a Florida 211 Network will ensure that a comprehensive, quality, efficient, and effective 211 “system” will be created in Florida. The alternative is a fragmented, inefficient “non-system” that fails to maximize use of tax dollars, and does not effectively help people to help themselves and help others.

In this era of government accountability, public-private partnerships, maximizing use of technology to reduce governmental costs, and reliance on individuals to be self-sufficient, state funding for implementation of the Florida 211 Network is a true winner.

The United Way of Florida urges the 2007 Florida Legislature to appropriate \$5 million to fund the Florida 2-1-1 Network.

For additional information, please contact the United Way of Florida at (850) 488-8287.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR FLORIDA MEDICAID REFORM

Coalition for Responsible Health Care Reform.

Medicaid is a key health care safety net program for Florida's families. It provides vital health care services to nearly 2.2 million children, pregnant woman, seniors, and people with severe disabilities. The Florida Medicaid program also helps strengthen our state's economy. State Medicaid matching dollars support 174,000 jobs, \$6.5 billion in wages and \$16.8 billion in business activity for FY 2005.

The 2005 Florida Legislature authorized the Agency for Health Care Administration to seek a federal waiver authorizing the State to conduct two Medicaid reform pilot projects, one in Duval County and one in Broward County. Implementation of these pilot projects has begun. As implementation proceeds and the Legislature evaluates them, it is imperative that the following principles be followed:

Medicaid reform should be done in the sunshine.

Changes to the Medicaid program affect the life and health of millions of Medicaid consumers and their families. A meaningful public process allowing for public review and comment on Medicaid reform proposals is essential to laying the groundwork for successful reform.

Maintain the guarantee of Medicaid coverage for consumers.

Today, Floridians who qualify for Medicaid and who need health care coverage receive it, regardless of where they live or when they apply for coverage. They can rely on the program to provide medically necessary services when they need them. Medicaid reform should maintain this important commitment.

Ensure Medicaid consumers' access to quality health care services and choice of providers.

People who rely on Medicaid have very low incomes and many have intensive needs for services due to special needs (developmental, physical, medical, mental, emotional, and behavioral). Therefore, the coverage consumers get through Medicaid must ensure that their wide-ranging vital health care needs are met. Further, inadequate access to and choice of Medicaid providers is a significant problem in many parts of the state. Medicaid reform must include initiatives such as rate adjustments to attract more Medicaid providers, particularly in rural communities. Moreover, Medicaid reform initiatives must focus on improving the quality of health care services provided to Medicaid consumers. This should include data compilation and publication to document improved outcomes, particularly for historically under served populations such as racial and ethnic minorities.

Maintain the open-ended federal commitment to sharing the cost of Medicaid.

Every dollar (\$1) that the state of Florida spends on Medicaid services draws down \$1.43 in federal funding. This federal match system gives Florida the flexibility to respond to downturns in the economy, increases in the number of uninsured, or public health or other emergencies that occur, knowing we will not shoulder those expenses on our own. Florida should not agree to any plan that weakens this federal-state partnership.

The United Way of Florida urges the 2007 Florida Legislature to support the Guiding Principles for Florida Medicaid Reform developed by the Coalition for Responsible Health Care Reform.

For additional information, please contact the United Way of Florida at (850) 488-8287.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Background:

The average cost of a home in Florida has risen almost 90 percent since 2001 while average wages have risen only about 10 percent. As a result, many Florida families cannot afford safe, decent, and affordable rental and single family housing. In addition to the long-standing needs of very low and low income families, steep increases in real estate prices have also effectively priced moderate income families out of the homeownership market in many communities. The result is a widening of the “gap” in the ability of many working families to access affordable rental and owner housing.

The Florida Legislature has taken definitive steps over the years to address the ever-present and quickly growing affordable housing problem. In 1992, the Legislature adopted the William E. Sadowski Affordable Housing Act, establishing a dedicated revenue source for affordable housing by phasing in two 10 cent increases in the documentary stamp tax paid on the transfer of real estate, the first in August 1992 and the second in July 1995.

Sadowski Act monies are statutorily dedicated to state and local housing trust funds, with 70 percent of the revenue dedicated to local governments through the State Housing Initiatives Partnership program (SHIP) and 30 percent dedicated to the state to fund programs such as the State Apartment Incentives Loan Program (SAIL). Annual revenues to the Sadowski Trust Fund has increased significantly in recent years as Florida’s real estate market has experienced steady growth. Like last year, this year the Trust Fund will total more than \$900 million, with about \$500 million attributable to annual intangibles tax revenues and about \$400 million carried-over from the previous year.

The 2006 Legislature passed far-reaching affordable housing legislation designed to stimulate the construction of home ownership and rental housing in high cost and high growth areas to meet the needs of extremely-low, very-low, low, moderate and middle-income families along this continuum and in particular, essential services personnel who are facing tremendous difficulties living in the communities in which they work. Approximately \$520 million was appropriated to support the bill.

2007 Legislative Issue

Last session, the Legislature appropriated only \$520 million of the \$900+ million in the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, leaving about \$400 million remaining unspent. Yet in many parts of Florida affordable housing shortages are reaching crisis proportions. While the 2006 legislation may have an impact, the bottom line is that more funding is needed. The SAIL and SHIP programs, already in place in statute, offer a reliable, quick and accountable vehicle for targeting the funds to areas of the state that need them and can best use them.

In addition, the 2005 Legislature placed a cap of \$243 million on the amount of funds that can be appropriated out of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, effective July 1, 2007. This is less than half the \$500 million to \$600 million available. The extent of the crisis facing the state dictates that the cap be removed so the Legislature can maximize appropriations for affordable housing.

The United Way of Florida urges the 2007 Florida Legislature to remove the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund cap and to appropriate all monies from the Trust Fund to support affordable Housing.

For additional information, please contact the United Way of Florida at (850) 488-8287.



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