

Legislative Link

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

WHAT'S INSIDE:

Page

\$652 Million Less To Spend.....	2
Children's Cabinet.....	2
KidCare Advances	3
Florida's Uninsured Children.....	4
Medicaid Reform.....	5
Speaker Rubio's 100 Ideas.....	5
Selection of 100 Ideas.....	6
Bills Heard This Week.....	7
VPK Program	8



United Way of Florida

United Way of Florida, Inc.
307 E. Seventh Avenue
Tallahassee, FL 32303
850/488-8287

STATE PARTNERSHIP NEEDED ON 211

The health and well being of Florida's residents – and, ultimately, that of our communities and our economy - is directly linked to their ability to access the information they need to address the most serious problems they face. We indeed live in the Information Age, where information and access to information can make the difference between success and failure, a good or bad quality of life and, in some cases, life or death.

Florida has a fledging program designed to insure that people can easily access the information they need when they need it: the Florida 211 Network. "211" is the three digit telephone number for non-emergency human services that 15.5 million Floridians in 50 counties currently have access to. It is indeed a life saver.

For those who can't pay their rent, are being abused by their spouse, have a loved one abusing drugs, can't find care for their child or parent during the day so they can work, and for those with a multitude of other personal problems, 211 is their main portal into the human services sector. It is also a critical component of Florida's disaster response system. In 2004 and 2005, 211 acted as a first responder, letting callers know in advance of the hurricanes the location of shelters, evacuation routes, etc. Following the hurricanes they answered thousands of calls, letting people know where to find food, water and supplies. Last year, more than 700,000 Floridians called 211 to find out where they could get the help they needed.

Community organizations such as the United Way, law enforcement, county governments, and others invest more than \$7 million annually into 211. These dollars have positioned 211 on the launching pad to become a vehicle through which millions of Floridians can access the information they need to attain and maintain self sufficiency, stay out of deep-end social services, and recover from disaster.

It's time for the State to become a partner in this unparalleled information tool. That's why legislation has been filed by Senator Evelyn Lynn (SB212) and Charles Chestnut (HB 283) to provide \$5 million next year to expand 211 into the 17 counties that currently do not have the service and to enhance the capacity of existing 211's so they can effectively respond to disaster and answer the growing number of calls they receive for assistance. This investment by the state will create a true statewide system that will be positioned and prepared to act as the front door to Florida's human services system for millions of Floridians.

Funding for the next fiscal year is tight. Later in this *Legislative Link* you can read how legislators will have \$600 million dollars less to spend next year. But what good is all of the remaining money, if people can't access the services they need?

\$652 MILLION LESS TO SPEND NEXT YEAR.....

On Monday, the Revenue Estimating Conference reduced its General Revenue forecast by \$956.3 million for this year and next. Projected collections for Fiscal Year 2006-07 were revised downwards by \$303.4 million or about 1.1% below the last estimate. For Fiscal Year 2007-08, expected revenues were decreased by \$652.9 million or 2.3% from the earlier forecast.

The Conference noted that the state's forecast mirrors the national outlook in significant ways, but that the heightened level of speculative activity and second-home buying in Florida made it particularly vulnerable to the widely anticipated real-estate market slowdown. Sales tax collections are significantly weaker as sales tax attributable to record-level housing construction slows. Related spending for items like furniture, appliances and carpets has also begun to slow. And documentary stamp tax revenue on real estate sales is projected to decrease.

As a result of the projected decrease, next year will be the first year since 1974-75 that the state will see a decrease in general revenue from one year to the next.

However, economists cautioned that this does not signal a weak Florida economy. Instead, they noted that the underlying economy is strong and that modest growth should return next year.

*These are REAL notes written by PARENTS in a Tennessee school district.
(Spellings have been left intact.)*

"Chris will not be in school cus he has an acre in his side."

"Please excuse ray Friday from school. He has very loose vowels."

"Please excuse Jason for being absent yesterday. He had a cold and could not breed well."

"Please excuse Jennifer for missing school yesterday. We forgot to get the Sunday paper off the porch, and when we found it Monday. we thought it was Sunday."

CHILDREN'S CABINET WORKSHOPPED

On Tuesday, the House Healthy Families Committee Workshopped HB 509, which would create a Children and Youth Cabinet. Proponents of the legislation testified before the Committee that it is time for Florida to take the steps it needs to address the complex needs of children and their families in a holistic, and comprehensive fashion that will truly result in more effectively addressing their needs.

In his inaugural address, Governor Charlie Crist committed his support to the concept. The bill will be heard next week in the Healthy Families Committee and an overview of its provisions will be included in your next *Legislative Link*. Cudos to Representative Loranne Ausley and Senator Nan Rich for filing the Children's Cabinet legislation.

KIDCARE ADVANCES

The move to simplify Florida's incredibly complex child healthcare program, KidCare, continued to gain momentum this week. The House Healthy Families Committee and the Senate Health Policy Committee considered legislation intended to make the program more family friendly.

The House Healthy Families Committee workshopped the concepts underlying its draft proposed committee bill. The bill establishes five overriding goals:

- Expanded eligibility
- Simplified eligibility
- Simplified transition among KidCare programs
- Increased family choice
- Simplified administration

Representative Galvano, Chair of the Healthy Families Committee, showed in his presentation of the concept that the House is heading in the right direction on its proposed KidCare changes. As soon as the bill is released, your *Legislative Link* will provide an analysis of it.

This week the Senate Health Policy Committee, with the leadership of Senator Mandy Dawson, unveiled its comprehensive KidCare bill. Like the House concept, the bill embraces significant changes that will make KidCare a much more streamlined and family friendly program. Among others, the bill:

- * provides for continued and presumptive eligibility for all children in the program;
- * provides for 60 days of continued eligibility redetermination to eliminate gaps in coverage when children transition from one program to another;
- * eliminates categorical eligibility and bases it on family income so that families don't have children in multiple programs with different providers;
- * reduces waiting periods for enrollment in the program and provides good cause exceptions to prohibition on Title XXI funded Kidcare coverage if a family has canceled employer-sponsored or private health benefit plan coverage;
- * reduces penalties for late payments;
- * reinstates coverage, subject to appropriation, for the children of immigrants who have been legally admitted to the United States for permanent residency, but if they came within the last 5 years they are subject to the "5 year bar" provision of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, which makes them ineligible for federal funding for either Medicaid or S-CHIP;
- * reinstates coverage, subject to appropriation, for the children of public employees whose family income is at or below 200% of the federal poverty level and whose employer sponsored health insurance is more than 5% of their family income;
- * expands coverage for pregnant women from 185% of the federal poverty level to 200% of the federal poverty level so that women receive prenatal care at the same income level their newborn is covered (200% FPL). This will improve birth outcomes;

KIDCARE ADVANCES continued

...

- * instructs the Agency for Health Care Administration to submit a state plan amendment to allow Florida to participate in the Family Opportunities Act passed by Congress in 2005;
- * excludes children who receive Florida Kidcare Plus benefits (CMS) with family income up to the maximum income threshold (200% of FPL) from cost-sharing requirements;
- * reduces paperwork requirements by directing that electronic verification of income be used before paper documents are required from families. Copies of pay stubs, W-2 forms, etc. will be required only if the electronic verification does not substantiate the income on the application;
- * removes the 10% limit on full pay enrollment;
- * directs the Department of health, in consultation with the Agency for Health Care Administration, Department of Children and Family Services, and the Florida Healthy Kids Corporation, to adopt rules necessary to implement the Florida Kidcare Program;
- * returns responsibility for outreach to the Department of Health in consultation with the KidCare Coordinating Council which is renamed the Council for Children's Health;
- * provides for a phased in administrative consolidation of the KidCare program by placing responsibility for the entire KidCare program in the Department of Health under a Deputy Secretary for Children's Health; it creates the Division of Children's Health Insurance and the Office of Child Health Coordination in the Department of Health and it renames the "Children's Medical Services Act" as the "Children's Health Act";
- * creates the Florida Commission on Children's Health administratively housed in the Executive Office of the Governor. It provides for 12 members, appointed by the Governor, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Chief Financial Officer;
- * provides dates that different programmatic functions will be transferred into the Department of Health;
- * requires that no later than January 1, 2008, Healthy Kids benefits will conform to the benchmark benefits specified in the Florida Kidcare statute (pediatric Medicaid benefits). This will make benefit packages throughout the KidCare program the same, except for the benefits for children with special health care needs in the KidCare Plus program (currently known as CMS).

(Thanks to Karen Woodall for providing the Summary above)

Florida Leads South in Uninsured Children

According to the University of Minnesota State Health Data Assistance Center, through a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Florida now has the highest proportion of uninsured children in the South.

The study, based on census figures from 1997-2004 found that the rate of uninsured children in Florida improved only slightly - from 17.5 percent to 15 percent – during that time. In contrast, the rates of uninsured children in South Carolina and Alabama were nearly cut in half, from 15 percent to 8 percent. Arkansas made the most dramatic improvement - its rate of uninsured children dropped by about two-thirds, from 22 percent to about 9 percent.

MEDICAID REFORM STUDY NEGATIVE

The University of Florida's Institute for Child Health Policy released a report last July which could be an indictment of the state's fledgling Medicaid reform efforts. For further information go to the website: www.ahca.myflorida.com/Medicaid/Policies and Presentation.

The study found that the number of children getting dental care plummeted 40 percent in the first year of a Medicaid pilot project in Miami-Dade, with only about 27,000 eligible Medicaid children visiting the dentist versus about 57,000 under the old fee-for-services Medicaid program. In addition:

- Dissatisfaction was high, with 46 percent of those who responded to the survey saying they were "very dissatisfied" while another 11 percent reported being "dissatisfied."
- The \$2.1 million in services provided appeared to be worth a fraction of the \$15.3 million provided to Atlantic Dental to run the program.
- The number of dentists participating in Medicaid program dropped from 691 to 251.

The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending; and to have the two as close together as possible. -- George Burns

SPEAKER MARCO RUBIO'S 100 IDEAS

The center piece of the Florida House of Representatives' agenda for the 2007 session is embodied in Speaker Rubio's 100 Innovative Ideas for Florida's Future. Here is how he describes the 100 Ideas.....

"We begin with one overarching principle; those who aspire to lead this state must accept responsibility for its future. We cannot see Florida only as it is today. We must envision it as it could and should be tomorrow and have a plan to turn that vision into reality."

We have asked the members of the Florida House to make a public commitment to the people of Florida, about our future. A commitment that asks every Floridian to work hard and play by the rules.

We will listen to Floridians. We will be guided by their ideas. And on every issue, we must ask ourselves: Will this idea make Florida a better state for our next generation? Will this Make Florida a better place to live and work - for my

children? We will no longer be afraid of the future. We will challenge it.

That is our vision. But a vision alone is not enough. We need a plan. And our plan is to write a book that will outline our commitment to Florida's future. It is called 100 Innovative Ideas for Florida's Future. The book will be a written commitment for EVERYONE to read that will detail our vision for the future and our plan to make it a reality.

When we gather in November of 2006 for the legislature's organizational session, no one will wonder what our agenda is or where it came from. The people of Florida will write it, and then it will be our responsibility to get it done.

We're not going to just collect innovative ideas. We're going to put these ideas to work. We're going to shine a light on what we believe and what we want to achieve. No surprises. No detours. No hidden agendas."

24 OF SPEAKER RUBIO'S 100 IDEAS



Idea Number

2. Replace the Sunshine State Standards.
5. Make Florida's **Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program** a global model for school readiness.
7. Identify gifted elementary school children and require our elementary schools to allow these children to work at a suitably challenging academic level.
13. Make public funding of universities contingent on university performance and outcomes.
32. Provide incentives to create innovative public-private partnerships that will expand **after- school programs**.
35. Combine fiscal and substantive committees into a single committee that will develop and fund the most appropriate policy issues for Florida.
50. Offer multiple-year vehicle registrations.
57. Adopt a uniform statewide building code.
64. Increase incentives for developers to not only provide the land for **affordable housing**, but also construct the housing units themselves.
65. Limit the number of passengers who can be transported by drivers age eighteen and under.
66. Require social networking sites to set up verification systems to require parental notification and consent for minors to use these sites.
68. Enhance independence and flexibility for community-based care.
69. Create a statutory mechanism for communities to create "**Children's Zones**".
78. Give Medicaid participants control over their own health while encouraging healthy habits.
81. Implement **Florida Senior Care** to allow Florida seniors to remain independent and receive the care they need at home and in their communities.
86. Make it easier for qualified, uninsured children to get coverage through **Florida KidCare**.
88. Encourage healthcare providers to expand preventive services and walk-in care for uninsured Floridians.
92. Expand the "loser pays" or "prevailing party" attorneys' fees statutes, strengthen the "offer of judgment" statute, and ensure that any case, claim, or defense not supported by necessary facts or law results in the right to claim attorney fees.
93. Adopt a constitutional amendment prohibiting Florida governments from growing faster than the income of their taxpaying citizens.
94. Require a supermajority vote for any tax increases.
95. Reduce the tax on phone, cable, cellular, and satellite services.
96. Amend the Florida Constitution to either place caps on all property taxes, or alternatively, abolish the property tax in whole or in part.
98. Institute a pilot program that creates a tax-free zone in Florida's most economically depressed areas.
99. Establish Housing First as an alternative to the prevalent system of emergency shelter/transitional housing.

Hospital Chart Bloopers

Actual writings from hospital charts:



She has no rigors or shaking chills, but her husband states she was hot in bed last night.
Patient had waffles for breakfast and anorexia for lunch.
She is numb from her toes down.
While in ER, she was examined, X-rated and sent home.

BILLS HEARD THIS WEEK

(Some information below is excerpted from legislative staff analyses)

HB 745 - Motor Vehicle Insurance for Foster Children (Reagan and others)

The bill requires the Department of Children and Families to establish a three-year pilot program in DeSoto, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, and Sarasota counties to provide funds, to the extent that they are available, to reimburse foster parents, residential facilities, or a foster child receives a driver's license and is added to an insurance policy.

Last Action: 3/13/07 HOUSE Favorable with CS by Committee on Healthy Families



HM 889 - State Children's Health Insurance Program (Harrell)

House Memorial 889 is a resolution to encourage federal reauthorization of funding for the Healthy Kids component of the Florida KidCare Program that provides health care to low-income children who are uninsured and not eligible for Medicaid. The memorial requests the Florida Congressional delegation to work to ensure that Congress reauthorizes the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). The memorial requests the Governor to work with the Florida delegation to ensure that SCHIP is reauthorized in a timely manner.

Last Action: 3/13/07 HOUSE Favorable by Committee on Healthy Families

I never drink water because of the disgusting things that fish do in it.

-- W.C. Fields

"My Mom said she learned how to swim when someone took her out in the lake and threw her off the boat. I said, 'Mom, they weren't trying to teach you how to swim.'" --Paula Poundstone

VOLUNTARY PRE-KINDERGARTEN ENROLLMENT SHOWS SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE

(excerpted from an AWI press release)

Florida Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI) Director Monesia T. Brown announced this week that enrollment in Florida's Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) program increased by 4,000 children in February. This year's VPK enrollment is currently 111,263, exceeding last program year's total by over 6,000 children.

In its second year of operation, approximately 50 percent of Florida's eligible four-year-olds are receiving free early learning education through the VPK program. This number is expected to continue to increase as parents enroll their children in the summer VPK session.

A statewide survey conducted last year showed that parents of children enrolled in the VPK program are overwhelmingly satisfied with the program's implementation and benefits. Over 92 percent of parents surveyed statewide reported that they were satisfied with the program as a whole. A large percentage of parents – 88 percent – indicated that their children were learning progressively in reading and math. Parents also said they noticed improvement in their children's social skills since entering the program.

.....But more Needs to be Done on the VPK Front

The numbers and survey results for the VPK program are positive signs that the program is on the right track. Everyone who has worked so hard to implement the program within such a tight time frame should be congratulated. But the program still has far to go to become the quality program envisioned by supporters of the 2004 constitutional amendment that created the program, and before it becomes a "global model for school readiness" per Idea #5 of Speaker Rubio's 100 Ideas.

Among others, the Legislature should adopt the recommendations of the 2003 Universal Prekindergarten Council chaired by then Lt. Governor Toni Jennings. Key among the Council's recommendations were that the VPK program:

- include ongoing assessments used to inform instruction, including pre and post assessments;
- require each program/provider to establish referral processes for children who need support;
- require age-appropriate, literacy-focused, individually-directed, and research-based curriculum that instills a love of learning in each child
- institute ongoing staff development combined with multi-level reimbursement and career ladder opportunities;
- contain a five-year target of at least one staff member in each UPK class with an associates degree and, after eight years, at least one staff member in each class with a BA degree; and
- require a school year of 1080 hours with 720 contact hours

In addition, the \$2,640 per pupil rate paid by the state is insufficient to fund a quality program. The Policy Group for Florida's Families and Children estimates, based on in-depth research from around the country, that the rate should be more than \$3,000.



United Way of Florida

UNITED WAY OF FLORIDA, INC.

**307 East Seventh Avenue
Tallahassee, FL 32303
Phone - (850) 488-8287
Fax – (850) 681-9137**

Theodore G. Granger
President & Editor

Beth Meredith
Chief Operating Officer

Kay Racine
Office Manager

Legislative Link is published by the United Way of Florida, Inc. for our members who may reproduce this newsletter for staff, volunteers, and agencies. All others must call 850/488-8287 for reprint permission.