

# Legislative Link

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## WHAT'S INSIDE:

	Page
Is Florida Broke ? .....	2
Long Term Care/Elderly.....	2
Healthy Start.....	3
Funding for Education and Human Services .....	3
Medicaid Budget Shortfall.....	3
Defense of Scouting Act.....	3
Bills Heard Last Week .....	4

## CHILDREN'S WEEK 2001

Last week, more than 1000 children, parents, childcare workers, teachers and others committed to improving the lives of Florida's children and their families convened in Tallahassee for Children's Week 2001. The week culminated at the Children's Day Rally, where preschool and elementary school aged children conducted a press conference. Mrs. Rhea Chiles also presented the 2001 Chiles Advocacy Award to Linda Merrell, who has worked exhaustively for more than three decades to improve the lives of children and families across the state. The guiding principles for Children's Week 2001 were contained in the *One Voice for Children 2001* paper. The preamble to the paper, reprinted below, highlights the core principals underlying many of the advocacy efforts in Tallahassee this year for young and old alike . . . . .

## ONE VOICE FOR CHILDREN 2001

*During the 1990s, the Florida Legislature crafted an array of innovative prevention initiatives intended to help all of our children succeed in school, and in life. These initiatives addressed such critical issues as community-based maternal and child health, school readiness, family support and preservation, early intervention, and child abuse and neglect. The Legislature envisioned that the services provided through these initiatives would help our children be better students, more productive workers, and responsible citizens. We agree, and believe Florida will reap untold benefits in coming years if they are appropriately supported.*

*In this time of unparalleled economic growth and prosperity, Florida must continue to invest significant new revenues in services that support our children and families. Without this investment, Florida's efforts to improve the quality of life for all of its people will be compromised, and future legislatures will be forced to pay inflated costs to address problems that could have been eliminated had earlier, adequate investment been made. We challenge the Legislature to make 2001 a banner year for children and their families.*



Helping all children succeed for life.  
An initiative of the United Way of Florida,  
Publix Super Market Charities, Inc. and  
Bank of America



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## **IS FLORIDA BROKE?**

Much has been made of the “budget shortfall” the Legislature is facing this year. In the midst of all the turmoil of whether to cut taxes or programs, one item that has been relatively overlooked – but which is gaining more attention – is the fact that Florida does have money available to address critical issues.

Currently, the Working Capital Fund has a balance of over \$700 million. This fund, which is statutorily created, is not required to maintain a minimum balance; it is an emergency funding source if general revenue falls short of financing appropriations. In addition, the Budget Stabilization Fund, which was passed by Florida voters in November 1992, has a balance of about \$940 million, far over its required minimum balance of at least five percent of the last completed fiscal year’s net revenue general revenue collections. All in all, the state currently has several hundred million dollars at its disposal to use to address critical issues, without compromising its ability to respond to economic, man-made, or natural disasters.

## **LONG TERM CARE/ELDERLY**

For anyone questioning whether or not the crisis in long term care is coming to Florida, consider this:

- The number of elderly in Florida who need publicly supported long-term care services because of physical and cognitive impairment will grow by over 42 percent between 1995 and 2010 - from 281,489 to 400,978 persons. If the current pattern of nursing home dependent long term care spending is maintained through 2010, public spending on long term care is projected to increase by \$3 billion in constant (inflation adjusted) dollars.
- 85 percent of the projected increase in spending will be for nursing home care.
- Funding for the Medicaid nursing home program has increased by over 100 percent since 1990.
- As a result, Florida is more dependent on nursing homes for delivery of long-term care than it was 15 years ago.
- In 1983, appropriations for community programs constituted 25.9 percent of all long-term care appropriations. By 1996, this percentage had shrunk to 11.3 percent and the nursing home percentage had grown to 88.7 percent, and is still above 85 percent in 2000.

## **HEALTHY START IN SENATE AND HOUSE BUDGETS**

Perhaps the budget cut proposed by Governor Bush that generated the most confusion and outrage is the \$1.5 million reduction to Healthy Start and regionalization of the community-based program by eliminating 10 of the 32 coalitions around the state. The confusion stems from the fact that Healthy Start is more a model of community-based services than just about any human service program around: it is not government; it is made up of Healthy Start coalitions that are private/public partnerships at the local level; it facilitates privatized health services; it is a model for providing local control to allocate public dollars; it enhances accountability through mandated performance-based contracting with providers; it operates under strict performance measures; it utilizes competitive bid processes for selection of providers; it provides local monitoring and oversight of purchased services; and it leverages significant additional funding from the public and private sectors over-and-above the \$4.5 million annual appropriation it receives from the state.

The outrage that has been voiced reflects upon the value of the program to society. Infant mortality has been reduced by 22 percent since inception of Healthy Start in 1991. It is estimated that more than 2,000 infant deaths have been prevented since 1991, due in large part to the Healthy Start program, according to the Department of Health. In addition, Healthy Start Coalitions, and the results they have generated are arguably one of the most important factors contributing to Florida’s improved ranking in the overall well-being of it’s children from 48th in the early 1990s to 36th in 2001.

Neither the House nor Senate budget proposals heading to their respective floors for approval contain the cuts to the Healthy Start program, or the regionalization of its Coalitions.

## SENATE RESTORES SOME FUNDING FOR EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES

Following Senate President John McKay's announcement last week that the Senate would not accept approximately \$370 million in tax cuts being pushed by Governor Bush and the House, the Senate immediately began investing the \$370 million into education and human services programs. \$230 million was added to public education, bringing the Senate's total proposed funding for public schools to \$762.7 million next year, a 4 percent increase over current per pupil spending and \$231.7 million more than the House's proposed \$531 million in spending.

That leaves approximately \$40 million for human services programs. However, the Senate went far above this figure as it rejected proposals to move more than \$400,000 MediPass patients into HMOs – which would have "saved" the state \$67 million – and to cut Healthy Start funding by \$1.5. The Senate also refused to accept House proposals to "save" \$34 million by reducing Medicaid eligibility to poor pregnant women for prenatal services from 185 percent of poverty to 150 percent of poverty, and to eliminate Medicaid dental, visual, and hearing services for adults.

## MEDICAID BUDGET SHORTFALL

Much has been said about the billion-dollar Medicaid shortfall the state is facing. But what's really been causing the shortfall? While expansion of Medicaid rolls resulting from more children receiving coverage through HealthyKids has received a lot of attention, the prime culprit, as shown below, are skyrocketing prescription drug costs.

	2000-2001		2001-2002	
	Total (Millions)	% of Total	Total (Millions)	% of Total
Prescribed Medicine	\$132.82	20.73%	\$554.08	37.01%
Hospital Inpatient Services	\$199.15	31.09%	\$258.69	17.28%
Nursing Homes	\$73.74	11.51%	\$167.26	11.17%
Prepaid Health Plan	\$48.71	7.60%	\$141.62	9.46%
Hospital Outpatient Services	\$84.20	13.14%	\$129.06	8.62%
Physician Services	\$53.01	8.28%	\$83.43	5.57%
Other Services	\$48.93	7.65%	\$162.92	10.89%
TOTALS	\$640.56	100%	\$1,497.06	100%

Source – Agency for Health Care Administration

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## DEFENSE OF SCOUTING ACT

SB 1900 has been filed in the Senate. As this *Legislative Link* went to press, it had no House companion. The bill creates the "Defense of Scouting Act". It defines the term "youth organization" as any "private non-profit corporation the general mission of which is to instill in young people values including patriotism, adherence to ethical or moral principles, physical health, and mental development through a program of instruction, engagement in outdoor activities, and community service". The bill goes on to provide that neither the state nor any political subdivision thereof may deny any youth organization "access to or the use of public facilities or eligibility for charitable grants or contributions otherwise authorized by law based upon such organization's requiring, as a condition of membership or employment, adherence to lawful standards of ethics and morals expressed by the organization".

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- *A closed mouth gathers no feet.*
  - *Artificial intelligence is no match for natural stupidity.*
  - *Blessed are they who can laugh at themselves for they shall never cease to be amused.*

## BILLS HEARD LAST WEEK

Below are some of the bills considered by the legislature during the second week of session. To access additional information regarding these bills – or any others – go to On Line Sunshine at [www.leg.state.fl.us/](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/).

**HB 47 FLORIDA VOLUNTEER AND COMMUNITY SERVICE** (Bense) - Relating to creating the Florida Volunteer and Community Service Act of 2001; authorizes the establishment of policies and procedures for the expenditure of funds to encourage and reward volunteerism. 3/21 Reported favorably from committee as amended H-SMT GOVT

**HB 239 CHILD RESTRAINT REQUIREMENTS/MOTOR VEHICLES** (Allen, B) - Relating to requiring a child 8 years of age or younger and less than 80 pounds and 4 feet 9 inches in height must be in an approved child restraint device in a motor vehicle operated on roadways. 3/20 Voted favorably from committee as CS H-TRANSPOR

**HB 421 MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT/DCFS** (Bean) - Relating to requiring the Department of Children and Family Services to develop & implement a pilot project to provide client-directed and choice-based mental health treatment & support services to certain adults. 3/20 Favorable w/1 amendment ELDER LT

**HB 547 TAX/DUES & FEES/PHYSICAL FITNESS FACILITIES** (Harrell) - Relating to exempting from the tax on admissions dues and fees paid to private physical fitness facilities. 3/20 Voted favorably from committee as CS H-BUS REGU

**SB 416 MEDICAID MEDICALLY NEEDY PROGRAM** (Senate Health, Aging) - Relating to Medicaid; establishing the medically needy income level; amending procedures relating to the Medicaid buy-in program to provide medical assistance to a specified category of individuals. 3/21 Voted favorably from committee as CS-HEALTH

**SB 446 HOMELESSNESS** (Constantine, L) - Relating to creating the State Office of Homeless Affairs within the Department of Children and Family Services; authorizing the Secretary of Children and Family Services to appoint an executive director. 3/20 Voted favorably from committee as CS S-APPR HHS

**SB 1018 LEARNING GATEWAY** (Pruitt) - Relating to authorizing a 3-year demonstration program, designated as Learning Gateway, which is aimed at the prevention and amelioration of learning disabilities in children between birth and age 9. 3/21 Passed to third reading

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