

# Legislative Link

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

## WHAT'S INSIDE:

	Page
House Budget Conferees .....	2
Bills Heard Last Week.....	2

## MAINTAIN SCHOOL READINESS QUALITY

Last Wednesday, the Senate passed its comprehensive education reform legislation (CS/CS/SB 2108). Among a multitude of other things, the bill transfers the Partnership for School Readiness to the Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI). As this *Legislative Link* went to press, the House education governance bill (CS/CS/HB 1533) was poised for passage on the House Special Order Calendar.

While both bills accomplish the same end-goal, placing the Partnership in AWI, the House bill goes much further, and sets the stage for possible dismantling of quality measures that early care and education advocates have worked so hard over the last decade to attain; measures intended to enhance the possibility that all children who are served have an opportunity to maximize their potential.

One of the ultimate goals of school readiness is to provide a pot of money, a "block grant", to local coalitions that will allow them to provide the most effective early care and education opportunities to the most children possible. Consequently, repeal of statutes that would unnecessarily hamper coalition innovation is a forgone conclusion. CS/CS/HB 1533, attempts to achieve this goal by repealing about 30 early care and education statutory provisions, including the Pre-kindergarten Early Intervention Program, the subsidized childcare program and the Gold Seal Quality Care Program.

While repeal of these statutes may ultimately be in the cards, the implications of their wholesale repeal are unclear. This is particularly true, given the provision amended into CS/CS/HB 1533 by the Council for Lifelong Learning providing that "Reimbursement rates shall not have the effect of limiting parental choice or creating standards or levels of service that have not been authorized by the Legislature."

If coalitions cannot adopt standards or levels of service unless they have been "authorized by the Legislature", and the Legislature repeals those standards, what standards can the coalitions use? The frightening conclusion is that the only option coalitions will have will be to dilute quality standards, rather than improve them. This is not acceptable.

**Please call your legislators today.** Tell them to support the Senate Bill (CS/CS/SB 2108). Let them know that repeal of these statutes should not be done carte blanche, in an amendment offered less than three weeks before the end of session. Instead, they should be studied over the interim to ensure that appropriate provisions are maintained in statute.



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## HOUSE APPOINTS CONFEREES

Conference committees began their deliberations last Wednesday. The House and Senate leadership have arrived at a compromise on the tax cuts. The Senate has agreed to take about \$175 million of the House-proposed \$350 million in tax relief. As this *Legislative Link* went to press, negotiations had begun in earnest.

## 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 1741 CHILD PROTECTIVE INVESTIGATORS/SEMINOLE CO.** (House Fiscal Respons Council) - Relating to adding Seminole County to the list of counties whose sheriffs provide responsibility for local child protective investigations. 4/24 Favorable w/1 Amendment - Senate Appropriations Sub - Health & Hum Svcs

**SB 622 FLORIDA HEALTHY KIDS** (Saunders) - Relating to providing that local-matching funds are not required by the Florida Healthy Kids Corporation if replacement funds are appropriated by the Legislature. 4/24 Voted favorably from committee on Senate Appropriations Sub - Health & Hum Svcs

**SB 830 AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER/HEALTH INSURANCE** (Geller) - Relating to requiring a health insurer or health maintenance organization include coverage for autism spectrum disorder as part of the major medical expense coverage. 4/24 Voted favorably from committee on S-BANK INS

**SB 1286 LAWTON CHILES ENDOWMENT FUND** (King) - Relating to revising procedures for the administration of the Lawton Chiles Endowment Fund and revises the availability and use of funds from the endowment fund. 4/25 Reported favorably from committee as amended S-APPROPR

**SB 1724 STATE MATCH FOR MEDICAID PROJECTS** (Klein) - Relating to requiring the Agency for Health Care Administration to develop mechanisms for certification of local funds as state match for Medicaid projects, to maximize federal Title XIX funding. 4/25 Reported favorably from committee on S-APPROPR

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