



The Florida Catholic Conference is the nonpartisan public policy voice of the Catholic Bishops of Florida.

2008 LEGISLATIVE SESSION: WEEK 8 SUMMARY

April 21-25, 2008

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Our legislative report, updated daily, contains closely followed bills that are expected to continue to move through the legislative process.

> **Legislative Report**

BUDGET

Click [here](#) to view a letter from D. Michael McCarron, executive director, urging the Senate President and House Speaker to strive for a just budget and identified key areas of concern.

Crisis Pregnancy Centers

Since 2006, \$2 million has been included in the state's fiscal budget to fund vital services for pregnant woman and their children at crisis pregnancy centers throughout Florida. Currently, funding is allocated in the House budget, but there is no appropriation in the Senate version. As Senate and House budget conferees meet to reconcile the differences in their respective budgets, this funding is in jeopardy of being cut drastically or totally eliminated. To view an alert sent earlier this week and take action, click [here](#).

Health Care

House and Senate budget leaders and presiding officers agreed to use \$300 million in "rainy day" funds from the Lawton Chiles Endowment to fund the Medically Needy and Medicaid for the Aged and Displaced programs. Hospice services, which were in doubt as the budget conference process began, are restored. These are positive developments in this difficult budget year, however, it remains likely that overall reimbursement for Medicaid services will continue to erode relative to costs of providing care. Nursing homes are likely to be underfunded by approximately \$160+ million and hospitals by \$200-\$300 million.

LIFE AND DEATH

Ultrasound Prior to Abortion

SB 2400 (Webster) was on second reading in the Senate on Thursday. After a series of amendments by Sen. Bennett countered with substitute amendments by Sen. Webster, the Senate took up **HB 257 (Traviesa)** with an amendment by Sen. Webster that restores the original language of **SB 2400**. Senate members caucused on the floor and despite appeals by Sen. Webster to vote on the original bill, the bill was temporarily postponed until Friday. Today the bill was again temporarily postponed until next week. The Conference just released a call to action on this issue, click [here](#) to send a message to your senator asking him/her to vote 'yes' on this bill.

Infant Abandonment

HB 7007 (Healthcare Council), which unanimously passed the House (**116-0**), also unanimously passed the Senate this week (**40-0**). **HB 7007**, substituted for **SB 1704 (Storms)**, expands the Safe Haven for Newborns Act by extending from 3 days to 7 days the time period after birth that a mother may anonymously turn her baby over to a hospital, fire station or emergency medical center. Mothers giving birth in a hospital who express intent to abandon may request the birth certificate be completed without their name. **HB 7007** will be presented to the governor.

SOCIAL CONCERNS

Autism Spectrum Disorder

CS/CS/CS/SB 2654 (Geller), cited as the "Steven A. Geller Autism Coverage Act" for his years of work on this proposed legislation, passed the Senate (**39-0**). The bill requires health insurance plans to provide coverage for screening, diagnosis, intervention, and treatment of autism spectrum disorder in certain children. It also prohibits an insurer from denying or refusing coverage or refusing to renew or reissue or terminate coverage based on a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. Comparable bill **HB 1291 (Porth)** is currently in the House Healthcare Council.

(See EDUCATION for Select Committee on Autism and Developmental Disorders.)

Children's Zones

HB 3 (Bendross-Mindingall), substituted for **CS/SB 500 (Bullard)**, passed the Senate (**33-0**) Friday and will be sent to the Governor for his signature. Based on #69 from the book *100 Innovative Ideas for Florida's Future*, the "children's zone" is to increase the stability, security, self support and success of children and their families by empowering and strengthening relationships between family members. The Harlem Children's Zone, founded in 1970, was the model for this strategy to create safe learning and living environments for youth and encourage education, social service and recreation. Pilot projects will be funded in Miami, Jacksonville and Orlando with three year grants from the Dept. of Children and Family Services.

Victims of Sexual Violence

SB 994 (Fasano) was laid on the table Friday, **HB 489 (Jenne)** was taken up in its place and passed (**36-0**). The bill requires employers with 50 or more employees to allow an employee to take up to 3 working days of paid or unpaid leave in any 12 month period to seek medical or legal services if he or she is a victim of sexual violence. These protections are already in current law for victims of domestic violence. The bill is ready for presentation to the Governor.

HEALTH

Access to Care

CS/CS/SB 2534 (Peaden, Jr.) implements Governor Crist's "Cover Florida Health Care Act", which includes removing full pay caps in KidCare programs, expands and extends health flex plans and creates other health care options for the uninsured. This bill passed the Senate (**39-0**), was amended and passed this week by the House (**70-39**) and returned to the Senate.

EDUCATION

Select Committee on Autism and Developmental Disorders

The Select Committee agreed on a proposed legislative bill, that was filed as council bill **HCC 27** by the House Healthcare Council this week. The bill would create a seamless system for children to be screened, evaluated and obtain medical and educational services through a melding of state and federal resources to effectively meet their diagnosed disabilities. The legislation also would establish a compact for insurance companies to develop an industry agreement to cover medically necessary services for children with developmental disabilities within a list of pervasive spectrum disorders. The bill creates a voluntary pre-kindergarten (VPK) program and expands eligibility for McKay Scholarships for students who received VPK early intervention services during the previous year. Click [here](#) to read testimony before the Health Care Council by Larry Keough, associate director in education, in which he thanked House leadership for moving forward with the legislation.

(See SOCIAL CONCERNS for additional bills related to Autism Spectrum Disorder.)

Private School Students/Interscholastic Activities

CS/HB 1481 (Bean) was withdrawn from the Policy and Budget Committee and is now available to be taken-up on the House floor. This bill allows private school students to participate in public high school athletics under certain circumstances. A call to action released earlier this week provided an overview of the Conference's opposition to this legislation and urged FCC Advocacy Network members to contact their state representative regarding this issue. Click [here](#), to view the alert and take action. In addition, to read a memorandum from Larry Keough, associate director for education, to all House members outlining in detail the concerns of the Conference, click [here](#). **CS/CS/SB 526 (Wise)** passed the Senate last week (**35-2**).

Corporate Income Tax Credit Scholarship Program

CS/CS/SB 1440 (Gaetz) was temporarily postponed in the Senate on second reading. The bill increases the cap by \$30 million for corporations to contribute to the scholarship program and would increase the amount of the scholarship next year to 60 percent of the unweighted Florida Education Finance Fund (FEFP), which would be about \$4,320. **CS/CS/CS/HB 653 (Traviesa)** was found favorable with a Committee Substitute by the House Policy and Budget Council (**21-9**) and read a send time in the House.

Ethics in Education

SB 1712 (Carlton) applies to public schools and private schools that participate in state scholarship programs and establishes comprehensive changes regarding the screening, hiring and termination policies for teachers and the reporting procedures for allegations of teacher misconduct. The bill passed the Senate (**38-0**), was amended this week by the House Policy and Budget Council (**29-0**) and is currently on the House calendar on second reading. The amended bill provides that benefits to employees would be discontinued based on a felony conviction and not by employees entering a plea of nolo contendere. Also, specific requirements for employees whose schools or programs are participating in the state's Voluntary Pre-K Program were deleted. Provisions as to background screening and conduct of employees in early childhood programs is contained within the legislation.

Academic Freedom Act

CS/SB 2692 (Storms) passed the Senate (**21-17**) this week. Companion, **CS/HB 1483 (Hays)** was substituted by **CS/SB 2692** and amended today in the House. The amended bill requires a "thorough presentation and scientific critical analysis of the scientific theory of evolution", precluding teachers from engaging in religious or anti-religious conversations about the teaching of evolution. Extensive debate is expected on this bill before the final vote. (Note: Evolution in its common understanding as a theory to explain the biological changes in organisms is not contrary to the Catholic understanding of creation, provided that any theory of evolution does not deny that God brought all things into existence and that He creates each individual soul).

OTHER

Taxation and Budget Reform Commission

On Thursday, the Commission held a final vote passing a constitutional amendment proposal that strikes Article 1, Section 3 from the Florida Constitution. This proposal to appear on the November ballot, removes from our state's constitution "Blaine" or "no-aid" language which prohibits any religious organization from receiving state aid directly or indirectly. In addition to removing this language, the proposal adds language that states individuals or entities will not be barred from participating in public programs because of religion.

> **Past weekly summaries**

> **Legislative jargon, charts on how an idea becomes a law and other advocacy tools**