



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

## 2008 LEGISLATIVE SESSION: WEEK 9 SUMMARY

April 28-May 2, 2008

The 2008 legislative session came to a close (*sine die*) at 6:02 p.m. today. A final legislative report and summary will be issued by the Conference next week.

### LEGISLATIVE REPORT

This report contains recent activity on bills that were closely followed by the Conference during this legislative session.

#### > **Legislative Report**

### LIFE AND DEATH

#### **Ultrasound Prior to Abortion**

After considerable debate, **SB 2400 (Webster)** failed in the Senate (**20-20**); a majority vote is needed in order for a bill to pass. This bill would have required a first trimester ultrasound be reviewed with and explained to a woman seeking an abortion, unless she signed a form declining that right. Some senators opposing the bill expressed concerns that it would establish an undue burden and impediment to a woman's right to have an abortion. Supporters countered that a woman's right to abortion would remain fully intact in Florida law, and this legislation would allow her to make a more informed decision involving life and death.

### SOCIAL CONCERNS

#### **Environment**

**HB 7135 (Environment & Natural Resources Council)** passed both chambers unanimously and will be sent to the governor for his signature. This omnibus bill makes a major shift in the state's energy policy. Details on the provisions of this expansive energy bill will be provided in the Conference's final legislative summary.

#### **Social Worker Identification**

**HB 35 (Richardson)** provides requirements, including a minimum of a bachelor's degree in social work, for using the title "social worker" as well as penalties for its misuse. The bill passed the Senate unanimously and the House (**39-1**) and will be presented to the governor for his signature.

#### **Personal Care Attendant**

**CS/CS/SB 370 Wise** passed both chambers unanimously and will be sent to the governor for his signature. The bill provides for the administration of a program to provide personal care attendants to persons who have severe and chronic disabilities and revises eligibility requirements for participation in the program.

#### **Window of Opportunity Act/Steven A. Geller Autism Coverage Act**

**SB 2654 (Geller)** after being considered by both chambers throughout the day was finally approved by the House at 5:58 p.m. The bill requires health insurance plans to provide coverage for certain children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. An analysis of the bill will be provided in the Conference's final legislative summary.

## HEALTH

### **Access to Care**

**CS/CS/SB 2534 (Peaden, Jr.)** offers low-cost, limited-benefits health policies to those without health insurance coverage. The House added provisions to also establish a separate plan that would create a "marketplace" of health care products that the uninsured could access through their employers. After being returned to the Senate and amended, the bill received final passage today in the House (**118-1**) and will be sent to the governor for his signature.

### **Certificate of Need**

**SB 2326 (Peaden, Jr.)** received final passage today in the House (**118-0**) and preserves core elements of the hospital Certificate of Need process and creates disincentives for frivolous appeals. The bill will be sent to the governor for his signature.

### **Organ and Tissue Donation**

**CS/CS/SB 2630 (Oelrich)** establishes a new framework for Florida's organ and tissue donor registry and for the promotion of organ donation. After being amended by the House, **CS/CS/SB 2630** received final passage on Thursday in the Senate (**36-0**) and will be sent to the governor for his signature.

## EDUCATION

### **Private School Students/Interscholastic Activities**

This week the House took up **CS/CS/SB 526 (Wise)** and amended it. The amendment by Rep. Bean greatly limited the provisions of the bill and established a two-year pilot program in three northeastern counties open only to private school students whose schools have no interscholastic or intrascholastic sports programs. The amended bill passed the House (**75-41**). The Senate concurred with the amendment and passed the bill (**38-1**). It will now go to the governor.

### **Corporate Income Tax Credit Scholarship Program**

**CS/CS/CS/HB 653 (Traviesa)** was substituted in the Senate for **CS/CS/SB 1440 (Gaetz)**. After several rounds of amendments by both chambers today, the Senate accepted a House amended version of the bill in which the scholarship amount is increased to \$3,950. The legislation also requires a study to assess the implementation of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (F-CAT) for scholarship students in private schools. The final House vote on the bill was (**82-34**), and the final Senate vote (**30-9**). The bill will be sent to the governor for his signature.

### **Early Learning**

**HB 879 (Kelly)** was substituted in the Senate for **CS/CS/CS/CS/SB 1670 (Gaetz)** and passed the House early this week. The Senate amended the bill and passed it (**40-0**). It was returned to the House where it received final passage (**118-0**). **HB 879** will be sent to the governor for his signature.

### **Ethics in Education**

**SB 1712 (Carlton)** passed the House (**118-0**) with several amendments, the Senate concurred with these amendments and the bill received final passage today (**40-0**). It will now be sent to the governor for his signature. The bill 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.

## BUDGET

Before *sine die* the House and Senate chambers approved a \$66.2 billion state budget. HB 5001, the general appropriations bill, passed the House (**75-44**) and the Senate (**32-8**). Passing the budget is the only required duty of the legislature during the regular session.

### **Crisis Pregnancy Centers**

Included in the budget is \$2 million for crisis pregnancy centers that provide vital services for women and children.

### **Affordable Housing**

The Affordable Housing Finance Corporation received \$303 million in the budget, \$60 million above the current \$243 million cap on the housing trust fund. Included in this appropriation is \$10 million for multi-family housing preservation, which had been advocated for by the Conference.

### **Health Care**

Outcomes include:

- The Medically Needy and Medicaid for Adults and Disabled programs were restored for one year, largely because of an infusion of \$300 million from the Lawton Chiles Endowment Fund, future legislation will be required to keep these programs funded after this next fiscal year;
- Hospitals to experience a 7.3% inpatient and outpatient Medicaid rate reduction;
- \$25 million in general revenue funds were provided to help fund the Low-Income Pool (LIP) program which compensates hospitals for care to Medicaid and uninsured patients;
- Nursing homes, received approximately \$120 million from the Chiles endowment funds, but continue to face a \$164 million cut (after annual price level increases, this will amount to a \$6-7 per Medicaid resident per day impact).
- Budget language creates a question as to whether nursing home staffing levels will be relaxed because of low funding levels
- Hospice services, which faced possible elimination, were restored with Chiles endowment funds, receiving a percentage cut similar to that experienced by nursing homes;
- KidCare growth of 38,000 children is funded, but other cost containment strategies are being implemented, including a \$1.5 million cut in administration and a freeze of price levels saving over \$15 million.

> **Past weekly summaries**

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